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Cambridge 'unleashed grotesque racism' with Arday appointment

Call for inquiry into how professor in plagiarism row was given top post

Richard Adams
Education editor

The University of Cambridge's leaders deserve blame for the "grotesque racism unleashed" by Jason Arday's appointment as a professor, according to academics calling for the university to hold an independent inquiry into the affair.

The Guardian understands senior academics at Cambridge are circulating a joint letter calling for an inquiry into the processes and circumstances around Arday being given the position, with many suggesting the university wanted a "quick fix" to improve the diversity of its staff.

Arday was appointed as a professor of sociology of education in 2023 at the relatively young age of 37 despite a slim track record of research and publications compared with those appointed to similar chairs at the apex of the university's academic structure.

He resigned on Wednesday after more than a week of public questions over claims of plagiarism in his PhD thesis and other publications, allegations of exaggerating his academic appointments, mounting controversy over his claims to have raised millions of pounds for charity, and lurid statements involving masked attackers and even a pig's head delivered to his parents' home in London.

Arday was preparing to publish his memoir in the US and Britain in the coming days, and had told the Guardian that its publisher, Simon & Schuster, was to pay him "1.4 million" for his extraordinary backstory, which includes being unable to speak until he was 11 years old.

The Cambridge academics want any inquiry to include external members and be given independent status. They point to concerns over the appointment committee for Arday's post, and to previous disputes within the university's faculty of education, where Arday was based.

Priyamvada Gopal, professor of postcolonial studies at Cambridge's English faculty and one of the group organising the letter, said: "An independent investigation must scrutinise how such an early-career appointment to a very senior and prestigious professorial chair was made and what both the faculty of education and university management may have got very badly wrong."

She added: "Whatever the results of any investigation, the university bears no little

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PHOTOGRAPH: ANDREW MATTHEWS/PA

Toxic pollution in every body of water in England

Politicians accused of "conspiracy of silence and inaction" as evaluation of water quality in lakes and rivers across country finds pollutants ranging from microplastics to "forever chemicals". **News** *Page 6* →

Milburn: spot pupils at risk of joblessness

Richard Partington
Senior economics correspondent

Primary schools in England should be required to identify children at risk of leaving education at 16 without finding a job, a government review is to recommend.

Alan Milburn, who is leading a review into Britain's crisis in youth worklessness, said he would call for sweeping changes in education policy alongside a shake-up of the benefits system to address the problem.

Speaking to the Guardian, he said ministers needed to "make somebody responsible" for identifying and supporting the children who risked becoming Neet (not in employment, education or training) after their GCSE year up to the age of 24.

"The warning signs are there from a very early, early age. You know, frankly from preschool," he said.

"So, definitely primary schools should be identifying children who are at risk of being Neet. And secondary schools and other services should be

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A propaganda poster in central Tehran. Iran denied talks were taking place when Donald Trump called off airstrikes on Sunday
PHOTOGRAPH: FATEMEH BAHRAMI/ANADOLU/GETTY

Trump threatens to jail 'treasonous' officials in munitions shortfall row

David Smith
Washington bureau chief

Donald Trump has lashed out at reports that the US is running short of key munitions in its war with Iran, threatening long prison sentences for officials who leak information.

The president claimed yesterday that his armed forces had "massive amounts" of ammunition and more was being manufactured and shipped to the Middle East.

"Defense companies are building the largest number of plants and factories in our country's history," Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform, without providing evidence or details about the specific weapons in question.

His remarks came after a newspaper report claimed he had demanded answers from his defence secretary, Pete Hegseth, over alleged shortages at a cabinet meeting held last Friday at Camp David, a presidential retreat in Maryland.

Trump told Hegseth he felt misled because he believed the problem "had been fixed", according to the Washington Post, citing two sources familiar with the exchange.

Hegseth allegedly defended himself and tried to shift blame to his deputy, Stephen Feinberg.

The president responded angrily yesterday to the Post's reporting, accusing the media of spreading "treasonous statements" and warning that those responsible would be pursued. "The 'leakers' of these treasonous statements are being hunted down," he wrote. "Long-term jail sentences will be sought!"

CNN separately reported that shortages of long-range guided missiles and air defence interceptors were constraining Trump's strategy in the conflict. The US had "nearly exhausted 80%" of its stock of Terminal High Altitude Area Defence interceptors, the network said.

The Post also reported that concerns over dwindling supplies had contributed to Trump calling off further strikes against Iran, despite his repeated threats to hit the country "very hard". The White House and the Pentagon rejected the claims.

> ***'Congress needs to take action. Americans need the truth. Hegseth can't give it. He needs to go'***
>
> **Joe Scarborough**
> *Former congressman*

Karoline Leavitt, the White House press secretary, described the account of the Camp David exchange as "FAKE NEWS!" on X. She wrote: "I was at Camp David with President Trump and Secretary Hegseth. This literally never happened."

Seeking to quash speculation about Hegseth's future, Leavitt insisted: "The president loves the secretary and thinks he's doing a tremendous job."

Sean Parnell, the chief Pentagon spokesperson, dismissed the reports of a confrontation between Trump and Hegseth and the claims of weapons shortages as "equally fictional".

Parnell added: "Secretary Hegseth isn't going anywhere and he's going to continue to work side by side with deputy secretary Feinberg to execute President Trump's agenda, strengthen America's defence industrial base, and ensure our warfighters have every capability they need to deter and defeat any adversary."

The increasingly public dispute comes as Trump seeks to project confidence over the course of the war. On Sunday, he claimed he had ordered and subsequently called off "the biggest attack since world war two" in the light of fresh negotiations over the strait of Hormuz.

Iran's foreign ministry denied that talks were taking place, despite the president's claim that Tehran was eager to reach a deal.

The Pentagon has faced criticism for manipulating US casualty figures and failing to hold regular press briefings about the war.

Hegseth, a former Fox News host who styles himself as the secretary of war, last month announced a screening programme for "testosterone deficiency" among US troops.

Joe Scarborough, an MS Now host and former Republican congressman, posted on X: "When Hegseth attacks media questions on this extreme munitions shortage as 'fake news', he makes this unforgivable blunder worse. Congress needs to take action. Americans need the truth. Hegseth can't give it. He needs to go."

No 10 vows to support pubs over plans to limit standing

Helena Horton

No 10 has vowed to confiscate powers from local councils that try to restrict customers from standing up while drinking in pubs or ordering at the bar.

It comes after the Guardian revealed yesterday that Westminster council in central London had recommended not allowing "vertical drinking" or ordering at the bar in its new draft licensing policy.

The draft document, which is out for consultation, recommends that pubs applying for new licences offer table service rather than allowing customers to order at the bar. It also recommends that new pubs in popular nightlife areas, including Soho, call last orders at 10pm to reduce disturbance.

A spokesperson for No 10 said: "Busy pubs full of people talking to each other is not a public nuisance, it is British life, and it is thousands of jobs.

"The government is devolving new licensing powers to the mayor [of London] to help support pubs and nightlife. Soho did not become world famous by taking last orders early, switching the lights off at 10 o'clock.

"The prime minister encourages local leaders to work with the industry so that pubs can continue to thrive."

The government is due to grant new powers to the mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, that will allow him to "call in" council decisions he does not agree with. Yesterday Khan said of the licensing proposals: "You can't run a world-famous nightlife district with a village-hall mindset."

A spokesperson for the mayor previously said he was against the "restrictive and anti-growth policies" and said he hoped to use the new powers to stop councils overreaching.

The Westminster council draft policy says pubs should: "Discourage excessive drunkenness and encourage the provision of more seating in premises that serve alcohol for people to sit and enjoy a drink and order food by table service in place of open bar space that caters for high volume vertical drinking."

It goes on to recommend that sales of alcohol and food should be "by waiter or waitress service only".

Operators of pubs and bars in Soho have criticised what they see as overly restrictive licensing policies and said that the new proposals could kill off nightlife in the West End.

The PM enjoys a pint. No 10 said busy pubs were part of 'British life'

Paul Swaddle, the Conservative leader of Westminster council, denied the plans amounted to a ban on "vertical drinking".

He told the Press Association that the media had been publishing "confusing stories" about the document and added: "There is no plan, and never has been, to ban drinking while standing up in a Westminster pub."

He added: "We don't need lectures from city hall on backing hospitality when they have directed the police to object to every new licence application as their solution to curbing crime in the West End."

The council also plans to ban the opening of new pubs and bars in what it terms the "cumulative impact zone", which encompasses Soho and large parts of the West End. This "zone strategy" will also include areas such as Victoria and Mayfair under the proposals. These areas will face restrictions on new bars and restaurants opening if the draft document becomes official council policy.

‘Anonymous’ no more. How art detective gave female artist’s work a starring role

A painting thought to be a self-portrait of Clara Peeters includes a tazza, which is used to display fruit PHOTOGRAPH: WIKTOR SZYMANOWICZ

Joanna Moorhead

Anonymous was often a woman: so said Virginia Woolf. And so thought Cynthia Osiecki one day in 2022, when she chanced on an unattributed still life in the storage area of the National Museum of Norway in Oslo.

Osiecki had been studying the work of a renowned 17th-century Flemish artist, Clara Peeters, one of the earliest practitioners of still life painting. Works by Peeters hang in the Prado in Madrid, the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford and the Metropolitan Museum in New York.

The Oslo painting, Still Life with Silver Vase, was created around 1620 and features nine freshly dead birds, hazelnuts, apricots and a fly perched on a bunch of grapes. It was once regarded as the work of a member of a famous family of Antwerp artists, Ambrosius Brueghel. But in the early 20th century the attribution was reassessed, and the work reclassified as being by “anonymous”. Then it was consigned to storage.

Osiecki began to wonder whether the work – some details of which have been obscured by many layers of varnish – could be by Peeters, an enigmatic but prolific artist who pushed the boundaries of still life painting in the Northern European baroque period. Osiecki began to compare the work with other pieces by the painter, who is thought to have been born in Antwerp around 1594. “I looked at the panel the Oslo work is painted on, and discovered it was from a supplier

‘Her paintings, including the newly attributed work, are all about the brevity of life’

Cynthia Osiecki
Art historian

Peeters often used,” she said. “Then I looked at other paintings by Peeters, and I noticed some of them had a *tazza* [a saucer-like dish on a pedestal] very similar to the one in the Oslo painting.” Osiecki noticed, too, similarities in the way the dead birds, the grapes and the hazelnuts were positioned in the composition.

One problem, though, was that Peeters was well known for signing her works, and the Oslo piece had no signature. But the panel had been damaged by woodworm, and the area eaten away was the bottom edge of the work – the very area where Peeters usually signed her pieces.

Still Life with small game and grapes on a gilded tazza, now known to be by Clara Peeters PHOTOGRAPH: BØRRE HØSTLAND/NATIONAL MUSEUM

It seemed more and more likely that the painting was a work by Peeters – but a piece of the jigsaw was missing. Peeters is famous for including miniature self-portraits in her work, often reflections of herself in pewter or glass objects, or on shiny fruit or vegetables. “I could see a shape on some of the grapes, and on closer examination I realised they look like outlines of human figures,” said Osiecki. These might be the artist herself, and it could be the image had been lost during conservation work.

This year the painting was officially reattributed to Peeters, and it will be one of the star exhibits in Woman Painter at the National Museum of Norway opening on 8 October, curated by Osiecki.

The show features the work of female artists working across northern Europe and Italy between 1550 and 1650, with paintings by 19 artists including Artemisia Gentileschi, Lavinia Fontana and Judith Leyster, as well as Clara Peeters.

Peeters was known for intimate still lifes reflecting the transience of this world, said Osiecki. “Her paintings, including the newly attributed work, are all about the brevity of life. We see recently dead birds, who will be part of a feast for humans, and grapes that will soon either be eaten or will decay. And though the work includes luxurious objects such as the *tazza*, Peeters is making the point that you can’t take anything with you when you die. In the end we’re all equal.”

The reattributed work demonstrates how art history is expanding to include women whose work has been lost or ignored, said Nora Ceciliedatter Nerdrum, director of exhibitions and collections at the National Museum of Norway. Over recent years, Europe’s major museums have been opening up to shows of women’s work – in 2016, Peeters became the first woman ever to be given a solo show at the Prado.

Nerdrum agrees that the quest to correct the omission of women from the canon of art history began by retrieving known works by women from storage; now, the search is on for women whose work has been labelled “anonymous”. “Watch this space, because there will be lots more of these finds in the future,” said Osiecki. “The more we look, the more archival research we do, the more women we’re going to find.”

Jazz club Blue Note swings into first British venue next month

Caroline Davies

The world-famous New York jazz club Blue Note is open its first British venue in London next month.

The club, which will be located in the basement of the St Martins Lane hotel in Covent Garden, promises the best of British jazz as well as world-class international artists, with a programme featuring emerging and established talent. Founded in Greenwich Village in 1981, Blue Note has expanded across the US and into Japan, China, Brazil and Italy.

Robert Glasper, the Grammy-winning US pianist, producer and songwriter, will headline the grand opening on 23 September, marking the centenary of the influential US saxophonist, bandleader and composer, John Coltrane.

Glasper said: “London has been a big supporter in my career from the very beginning and I’ve always had so much respect for the musical culture of the UK past and present. There is a deep love for music that pushes boundaries and Blue Note has always been a home for that same spirit.

“Starting this new club is about creating a space where jazz, R&B, hip-hop and everything in between can meet, evolve and surprise people.

“I’m excited to build something in London that feels intimate, fearless and alive – a place where artists can take chances and audiences can experience the music up close.”

The venue will feature two performance spaces. Its 250-capacity main room will stage two shows each night and remain open until 1am from Monday to Saturday, and until midnight on Sundays. Tickets for the first run of shows will go on general sale on 14 August. A second, 100-capacity room, B-Side, supporting emerging British talent, is due to open later in the year.

Tsion Bensusan, the co-owner of Blue Note Entertainment Group, described the opening as a “significant milestone”, adding: “London has always been one of the world’s great music capitals, with an extraordinary jazz heritage and an incredibly diverse creative community,.

Jazz drummer Roy Haynes at the Greenwich Village Blue Note in 2013

“Our hope is that Blue Note London becomes more than a venue – it becomes a home for musicians, a gathering place for the community and an integral part of London’s cultural landscape.”

Performances and residencies will include the neo-soul singer Erykah Badu, jazz-pop pianist and songwriter Jamie Cullum, award-winning saxophonist and composer Nubya Garcia, drummer Yussef Dayes, Afrobeat collective Kokoroko and the rapper Hak Baker.

Leipzig drone bomb was near plane carrying ammunition

Deborah Cole
Berlin

A catastrophe was possibly narrowly averted by the discovery of a drone carrying explosives at Leipzig airport, German officials said, as they examined whether a foreign state could be behind the plot.

One of the Ukrainian aircraft next to where the bomb drone was found was loaded with military ammunition, according to a classified police report quoted by the public broadcasters WDR and NDR and the Süddeutsche newspaper.

The interior minister, Alexander Dobrindt, who warned on Wednesday that Germany faced a "new level of danger", said that only an apparently "ripped" detonator had prevented the device going off near Ukrainian cargo planes on the tarmac at the shipping and military hub.

The highly explosive Ukrainian cargo, filled with jet fuel, had apparently been transported from France to Leipzig shortly beforehand.

The airport is about 13 miles from the centre of Leipzig. The facility hosts a major cargo processing centre that employs hundreds of people round the clock and is adjacent to two autobahn routes.

The Bild newspaper reported that the drone found near the Ukrainian plane had a handmade remote detonator that did not work, and investigators hoped it could offer clues as to its origin and the culprits.

Leipzig airport's status as a Nato and German military logistics hub, as well as the base for Ukraine's Antonov Airlines in Europe, has directed suspicion toward Russia.

Roderich Kiesewetter, a member of the German parliament's intelligence committee, blamed Russia directly. "I consider the threat to Germany posed by hybrid attacks orchestrated by Russia to be serious," said Kiesewetter, a member of the coruling Christian Democrats.

"I also believe that the attempted drone attack at Leipzig airport was a targeted hybrid attack – in other words, an attempted act of terrorism – orchestrated by Russia."

An airport staff member discovered the drone shortly before midnight on Tuesday, "hovering" near the ground between two

▲ *A police investigator with a bomb disposal robot at Leipzig airport*

Antonov Airlines An-124 cargo aircraft, among the world's biggest freighters.

Police said a drone defence sensor system at the airport, considered "critical infrastructure" by Germany, had not picked up the drone.

Dobrindt told reporters that the drone seemed to have been modified to circumvent electronic detection. It was attached to a package of explosives roughly the size of a fist, according to the WDR-NDR-Süddeutsche report, and investigators said the substance inside was believed to be semtex, a powerful plastic explosive.

The discovery of the drone led the airport to suspend air traffic, forcing a DHL cargo plane from Marseille on its approach to take off again. The plane then collided with what is believed to have been a second drone.

The media report said that plane had also been carrying unspecified "dangerous goods" before it made an emergency landing in Hanover, about 155 miles north-west, with minor damage.

Bild said the drone that hit the DHL plane had a camera used to film the attack.

Air traffic had been diverted on Wednesday from the airport's southern runway, but was back to normal yesterday with no additional security measures reported.

Ukraine has been using Leipzig airport as an alternate location for the transport of military goods since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, according to official records. German defence ministry officials said the country's armed forces were not conducting military transport operations at the airport at the time of the incident.

◀ *An elderly man is evacuated from a building hit by Russian strikes in Kramatorsk, Ukraine, this week*

PHOTOGRAPH: FRANCISCO RICHART/GETTY IMAGES

Nato vows to supply air defences to Ukraine as Russia ramps up airstrikes

Guardian staff

Nato is working to get Ukraine the air defences it "urgently needs", its secretary general has said, after Kyiv failed to shoot down a single Russian missile in an attack on Wednesday, and as Volodymyr Zelenskyy warned that Moscow was seeking to significantly increase missile production before the winter.

Speaking at a National Security and Defense Council meeting on winter resilience, the Ukrainian president did not rule out the idea that stalling missile supplies from western allies were "aimed at making Ukraine, so to speak, more willing to compromise" in peace talks with Russia.

After meeting the Nato secretary general, Mark Rutte, Zelenskyy said: "It is important to cut through all red tape and make the necessary political decisions. Literally every day, people's lives here in Ukraine depend on the resolve of our partners in Europe and the United States."

Russia launched 24 ballistic missiles in an overnight attack yesterday, killing at least 17 people. Preliminary data from the Ukrainian air force showed its defences shot down 98 of the 115 drones fired by Russia overnight, but no ballistic missiles.

Zelenskyy said that in the first half of this year, supplies of air defence missiles from Ukraine's allies had fallen to a third of their 2025 level.

The president also warned that Moscow was looking to significantly increase ballistic missile production as winter neared, when it is expected to renew its campaign against Ukraine's energy sector.

Serhii Beskrestnov, an adviser to Ukraine's president on the development of defence technology, estimated that Russia was capable of launching 100 ballistic missiles every month to attack logistics hubs, industrial facilities, food stores and warehouses. "The war of attrition has entered its next phase," he said on the Telegram app.

Ukraine has been short on US-made Patriot interceptors capable of downing Russian ballistic missiles since the start of the war. But in recent weeks it has become clear there is an acute shortage, with Moscow attacking Kyiv about every three days in July alone. Zelenskyy said the interceptor shortage was mainly caused by the war in the Middle East.

Patriot missile systems are the only system in Ukrainian service able to intercept the Russian Iskander-M, S-400 and Zircon missiles, according to the Ukrainian air force.

Russia often combines ballistic missiles with cruise missiles, drones and decoys, forcing defenders to track many threats and ration scarce interceptors, but Ukraine says it has too few batteries and interceptors to properly protect itself.

The interceptor shortage has become more acute as a result of the US-Israeli war on Iran, which has consumed large numbers of Patriot and other interceptors. An analysis by the Associated Press estimated that the US Patriot inventory had fallen by at least 65% since before the war.

Production cannot immediately close the gap. Lockheed Martin delivered more than 600 of the newest model of interceptors in 2025 and is working toward annual capacity of 2,000 by the end of 2030. But according to some estimates, Gulf states collectively fired more than 1,100 interceptors in the first three months of the Iran war.

Nato says Europe's first Patriot missile production facility is expected to open in September in Germany.

At a Nato summit last month, Donald Trump said the US would give Ukraine a licence to produce Patriots. About three weeks later, he said he had not made a final decision.

The gen Z whisperer
BBC hires 26-year-old in battle for audience
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'Almost superhuman'
Acosta's ensemble is a balletic delight
Page 15

National

PHOTOGRAPH: JAMES LINSELL CLARK/SWNS

Back to nature Traditional methods are used to harvest the King's College wildflower meadow at the University of Cambridge. In 2020 the college replaced part of the 1720s Back Lawn, behind King's College chapel, with a biodiverse field which is cut, dried and baled in August.

Andrew tells court alleged stalker chased him near home

PA Media

Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor says he came face to face with an alleged stalker wearing a balaclava who chased after him close to his Sandringham home, a court has heard.

Alex Jenkinson, 39, is charged with using threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour towards the former Duke of York on 6 May.

Suffolk police are also applying for a stalking protection order against Jenkinson, relying on evidence from Mountbatten-Windsor and searches on Jenkinson's phone.

In a statement read out in his absence at Westminster magistrates court yesterday, Mountbatten-Windsor said that when he was out for a walk with his dogs on the Norfolk estate, he had spotted a car which he assumed to belong to press photographers, and then he and his security detail "drove past the car".

He said a man had "turned and faced me – he was wearing a balaclava face covering". Mountbatten-Windsor described him as an "out of place" man, and added: "I then saw a loose dog running towards him.

"Then he realised who I was and began to sprint after my vehicle."

Jenkinson is accused of causing the former duke of York to "fear unlawful violence" during the confrontation in Wolferton, close to Mountbatten-Windsor's Marsh Farm property.

Jenkinson denies the charge and has also pleaded not guilty to a further charge of using threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour with intent to cause fear or provoke unlawful violence against another man, Stephen Terry, in King's Lynn, on 5 May.

Mountbatten-Windsor is due to give evidence by videolink at the criminal trial, which has been set for 21 December. Jenkinson has been bailed with conditions not to go near a number of sites linked to the royal family – Sandringham, Buckingham Palace, Balmoral, Windsor and Highgrove. He must also not try to contact Mountbatten-Windsor directly or indirectly or approach him.

▲ *Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor said Alex Jenkinson sprinted at him*

Safety fears as scientists make first viruses designed by AI

Ian Sample
Science editor

Scientists have made the first viruses designed by artificial intelligence in a milestone that raises hopes for new medicines but also concerns over how to ensure the technology remains safe.

The viruses are specific kinds known as bacteriophages which only infect bacteria and are used around the world to treat patients with persistent infections. In lab tests, a cocktail of the AI-designed viruses killed *E coli* bugs that were resistant to natural bacteriophages.

Dr Brian Hie, a chemical engineer at Stanford University in California, used genome language models, the genetic equivalent of the large language models behind AI chatbots, to design functioning genomes for bacteriophages. The viruses were then made in the laboratory and pitted against *E coli* in a dish.

The ability to "rapidly design" genomes and tune them for specific bugs while overcoming resistance could "transform phage therapy" and "expand biotechnological toolkits", the researchers write in the journal Science.

But beyond the potential benefits, the scientists say the work raises "important biosafety, biocontainment and biosecurity considerations" and urge others who are designing whole genomes to "consult both safety and security professionals throughout the project".

In an accompanying article, Prof Tom Inglesby and Dr Moritz Hanke at the centre for health security at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, said: "Although this is promising for life sciences applications, it also raises urgent biosafety and biosecurity questions. The ability to compose viral genomes using generative AI now exists; the governance to safely steer it does not."

Hie and his colleagues used AI models called Evo1 and Evo2 to design the new viral genomes. The models were trained on genetic data from 2m bacteriophages. The genetic code for viruses that can infect plants, humans or other animals was intentionally excluded from the AI's training to reduce the risk of it designing dangerous viruses.

> ***'The threat from full AI design and writing of a genome of a virus is very overblown'***
>
> **Tom Ellis**
> *Imperial College London*

The AI generated thousands of potential genomes, from which the researchers selected nearly 300 to make in the lab. These were dropped into bacteria which read the genetic code and churned out the new bacteriophages. The process was not efficient: only 16 bacteriophages proved to be viable, but a cocktail of them swiftly overcame resistance in two different strains of *E coli*.

Bacteriophage genomes are tiny, but Inglesby and Hanke say the work nevertheless proves that generative AI can create functioning viral genomes. Whether the same approach can be applied to other viruses is unknown, but they say work on pathogens that could infect humans, animals or plants should not be pursued. "Such genomes might encode new pathogens that … cannot be contained by existing countermeasures," they write.

Tom Ellis, a professor of synthetic genome engineering at Imperial College London, said the work was impressive but revealed how hard it would be to make complex genomes. "This is literally the smallest and easiest genome to make," he said.

An AI trained on the genetic code of dangerous bugs could be used to design more harmful viruses, Ellis said, but controlling access to genetic data and having limits on making genomes that look dangerous would help. "But honestly," he said, "the threat from full AI design and writing of a genome of a virus or bacteria is very overblown when we consider that just taking existing pathogens and making gain-of-function changes to their genomes is so much easier and much more likely to be a real pathogenic threat."

▼ *An assessment by the EA found only 14.3% of country's surface waters were in good ecological status*
PHOTOGRAPH: CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/GETTY

Every single body of water in England contains toxic chemicals, data reveals

Pippa Neill
Environment reporter

Every single English water body is polluted with toxic chemicals, new government data shows, while just 14.3% of surface waters achieved good ecological status.

Each of the country's rivers, lakes and estuaries was assessed by the Environment Agency (EA) as part of a six-yearly evaluation of England's water quality. The EA checked for a range of toxic chemicals, from Pfas - or "forever chemicals" - to microplastics. Waters were also checked against a range of standards covering wildlife, water quality and physical habitat.

If concentrations of the chemicals exceed the set standards, the water body fails to meet good chemical status. In the latest assessment, every surface water body in England failed on this measure.

Under the water framework directive regulations, the official target date for all water bodies to reach good chemical and ecological status is December 2027, although some individual chemicals have deadlines in the 2030s.

The EA said this failure was driven almost entirely by the presence of mercury, Pfos - a type of Pfas with links to cancer - and PBDEs, which were formerly used as flame retardants. These chemicals are persistent, meaning they do not break down and can accumulate in the environment.

England's water bodies are not predicted to reach good chemical status until 2063, when the EA says the persistent chemical pollutants should have degraded sufficiently for waters to again be considered unpolluted.

Ami McCarthy, Greenpeace UK's head of politics, said the scale of the crisis was "sobering".

The government needs to take "urgent action to turn off the chemicals destroying our land at the source", she said.

The UK government has been accused of failing to take action on toxic chemicals after its plan to tackle Pfas chemicals failed to match the tougher stance being taken in Europe. It has also been accused of failing to tackle mercury pollution, with Britain being one of the few countries yet to ban mercury in dental fillings.

The metal is a potent neurotoxin that can harm the nervous, digestive and immune systems, as well as the lungs, kidneys, skin and eyes, even at low levels of exposure.

Craig Bennett, chief executive of The Wildlife Trusts said if it was a "foreign power maliciously poisoning every single water body in England with cancer causing chemicals, politicians right across the political spectrum would be utterly horrified and demand the government of the day do absolutely everything in their power to fight back, stop it immediately, and seek some sort of retribution". Instead, he said "politicians across the political spectrum have come together with a conspiracy of silence and inaction".

> ***'Politicians have come together with a conspiracy of silence and inaction'***
>
> **Craig Bennett**
> *CEO, The Wildlife Trusts*

Richard Benwell, the chief executive of Wildlife and Countryside Link, said: "With thousands more forever chemicals on the market from cosmetics to clothing, the government must act now to stop another wave of contamination by matching EU safeguards and making the polluting companies pay for clean up."

Water campaigner Feargal Sharkey said the EA has "failed every water body in the country" and "overseen the collapse of an issue they were supposed to be policing".

He called on the environment secretary to rewrite the guidance and enforce the law as it stands.

The EA said it was undertaking a range of activities to improve understanding of chemicals in the environment and identify potential sources affecting rivers, groundwater and drinking water catchments.

"Water companies must be made to take responsibility for their part, but pollution from agriculture is now one of the biggest drivers of environmental damage in UK rivers. It's time for the government to work with farmers, providing proper support to rein in runaway use of fertilisers and pesticides, and boost nature-friendly practices," McCarthy said.

Assessment against a range of standards covering wildlife, water quality and physical habitat also showed that just 14.3% of England's surface waters achieved good ecological status, a decline from 16.3% in 2019.

However, the EA said the two datasets were not directly comparable because it had updated its analytical methods.

The environment secretary, Angela Eagle, said the results "underline the need for wholesale change across the water sector".

James Wallace, chief executive of the environmental charity River Action, said: "Despite successive governments' promises, nothing has changed. Our rivers remain among the filthiest in Europe, poisoned by sewage from polluting, profit-driven water companies and by industrial-scale agriculture, including chicken manure runoff from intensive poultry units that rear tens of millions of birds for fast food and supermarkets."

Drought conditions
Could our taps run dry?

Half of England and all of Wales are officially in drought. But what does this mean and could our taps eventually run dry?

What does it mean to be in drought?
There is no single definition of drought and every drought is different. But they are all characterised by a prolonged period of low rainfall creating a shortage of water.

What are the drought conditions like this summer?
Helen Wakeham, chair of the National Drought Group, said this year's drought was "exceptionally serious" and would have long-lasting impacts on the environment and the economy. In July, England received 7% of the long-term average rainfall, making it the driest July since records began almost two centuries ago.

But isn't the UK famously rainy?
Yes, the UK does have a global reputation for its wet weather and we did see particularly heavy rain in the first half of the year.

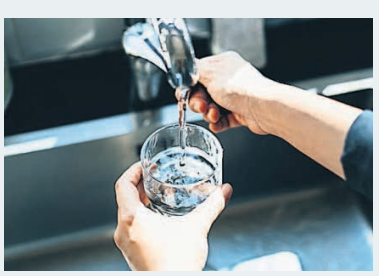
While winter rainfall can help to replenish reservoirs and groundwater, summers are becoming exceptionally hot and dry. Combined with climate-induced heatwaves, we are currently using water faster than nature can replenish it.

A key issue is also storing water during times of plenty. The UK has not built a new reservoir since 1992.

Where do water companies get the water from?
Most of the water comes from lakes, reservoirs and rivers. This is then pumped to water treatment plants before being directed to homes. The amount of water that companies can take is controlled by environmental regulators.

During times of drought, water companies can use drought permits and drought orders to take more water. Last year Southern Water applied for a drought order that allowed it to draw water from an internationally prized chalk stream and rare salmon habitat.

Why is the UK running out of water?
The Environment Agency (EA) has estimated England's public water supply could be short by 5bn litres a day by 2055 without urgent action to futureproof resources.



▲ *Without action, the UK remains vulnerable to water shortages*

Water demand is going up as the population grows and new industrial demands from datacentres and energy infrastructure require more water. Plus, the water available to supply those needs is going down as the effects of the climate crisis kick in, and we have greater variability and unpredictability of rainfall and greater water demand during hotter, dryer summers.

How can the UK become more drought resilient as climate breakdown accelerates?
While individuals can reduce water wastage through, for example, adopting a vegetarian diet or monitoring household water consumption using a smart meter, investment is key.

The EA expects 60% of the predicted 2050 water deficit to be addressed by water companies managing demand and dramatically reducing leaks. The remaining 40% would come from boosting supply, including the building of new reservoirs and water transfer schemes.

Can water companies go further than a hosepipe ban?
Around 40% of the population of England is currently under a hosepipe ban. Breaching the ban is a criminal offence and can lead to a fine of up to £1,000.

Water companies are all required to have drought management plans setting out what they would do in an "emergency drought" scenario. This could see rota cuts introduced where water is limited to a few hours each day.

If nothing changes, could we actually run out?
Yes, without investment and reductions in our water use, we are facing a serious problem.

In some areas, the impact is already being felt. For example Sussex, Cambridgeshire, Suffolk and Norfolk have all seen housing and business development delayed due to water supply availability and ageing or inadequate water infrastructure.

South East Water said this week supplies in its area are "critically low" and warned customers they may lose supply unless demand for water in the area drops.

In a report written in the aftermath of the 2025 drought, which saw the driest spring in 132 years, parliamentarians warned that without action, England's taps could run dry.

What does this mean for the future?
Water companies are channelling record investment into fixing leaks and while it has been more than three decades since a major new reservoir was built in England and Wales, several are now in the planning stage.

Pippa Neill and Safeerah Ahmed

Record heat
Health and energy fears as central and eastern Europe hit by new highs

▲ *People cool off under a misting system in Budapest, Hungary, top, while residents of Pismány Hill, north of the capital, collect drinking water. Below, a public fountain in Vienna is in high demand*

PHOTOGRAPHS: SHUTTERSTOCK; FERENC ISZA/AFP/GETTY; ELISABETH MANDL/REUTERS

Matthew Taylor
Ajit Niranjan

Temperature records have been broken in several countries across central and eastern Europe as the extreme weather that has caused wildfires and droughts across the continent continues.

Countries including Slovakia, Austria and Hungary have registered record temperatures. The Slovakian hydrometeorological agency said yesterday that a new high of 42C (108F) had been reached in Dolné Plachtince.

Authorities in Poland were forced to shut down the Kozienice and Połaniec coal-fired power plants after critically low water levels in the Vistula River limited supplies of cooling water. The disruption removed about 1.3GW of capacity from Poland's power system.

On Wednesday the Polish prime minister, Donald Tusk, had urged employers to look after their staff and provide air conditioning and cold water.

In Germany, climate activists demanding an end to the use of fossil fuels protested outside the chancellery against the lack of government action to keep people safe from extreme heat. An estimated 11,900 people in the country have died from heat this summer, according to new estimates from the Robert Koch Institute.

"This extreme heat and its consequences are the result of a fossil fuel policy that is completely irresponsible and extremely dangerous," said Annkatrin Schwirten of Fridays for Future Berlin. "We must not become accustomed to thousands of heat-related deaths every summer."

The Hungarian prime minister, Péter Magyar, tweeted yesterday that a nuclear power station that had been temporarily powered down would be going back online. "Good news: we are already nine centimeters above the Danube's Sunday low point, and rain is expected in the Austrian catchment areas," he wrote. "One of the turbines at the Paks Nuclear Power Plant is operating. Regardless of this, on today's hot day there will still be a strong need for voluntary reductions in electricity consumption."

The brutal heat and continuing drought conditions are being supercharged by the escalating climate crisis, and experts warn these are putting huge pressure on local populations, critical infrastructure and wildlife across the region.

Paweł Pomian of Eko-Unia, a Polish environmental organisation, said the "power plants driving climate change were increasingly becoming its victims".

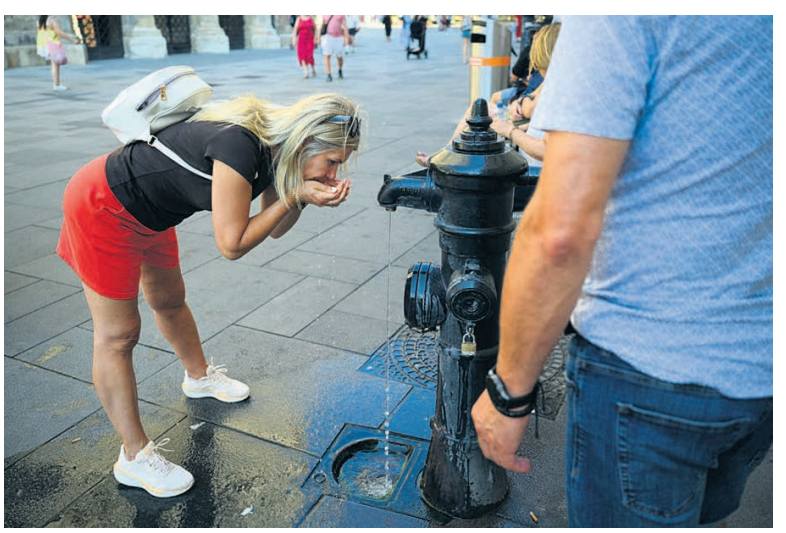
The impact of this summer's extreme conditions should be a "wake-up call not only for Poland, but for the whole of Europe", Pomian said. "The faster we develop wind and solar power – technologies that require the least water to generate electricity – the better we can protect both energy security and our rivers."

The heatwaves have also deprived vegetation of moisture and primed much of the continent for wildfires. About half a million hectares have burned across the EU since the beginning of the year, mostly in Spain and France, according to data published yesterday by the European Forest Fire Information Service. A further 292,000 hectares (721,000 acres) have burned in Ukraine.

The severity of fire weather – the hot, dry and windy conditions that make it harder to battle blazes – has set records for the time of year, by alarming margins in some countries.

In Austria, which had a record high temperature of 41.2C on Wednesday, cumulative fire weather is more than twice as severe as the previous record for this time of year. In Czechia, which registered a national temperature record earlier in the summer, fire weather by early August was more than 50% worse than the previous record. In Slovakia it was 32% worse.

Last week, a rapid analysis by the World Weather Attribution consortium found that global heating had made last month's hot, dry and windy weather at least 20 times more likely in Spain and twice as likely in France.



Architects cleared after man, 53, killed by falling window

Matthew Weaver

The architecture firm founded by Norman Foster has been cleared over the death of a man killed by a window that fell 90 metres from a newly constructed London penthouse.

Foster + Partners (F+P), the firm behind some of the world's most recognisable buildings such as the Gherkin and revamps of the British Museum and the Reichstag in Berlin, was not held to be responsible for the death of Mick Ferris, 53, a coach driver, in 2018.

However, St James, the project managers of the building where the incident took place, and its engineers, Lindner Prater, were found guilty of safety breaches over the death by a jury at Inner London crown court.

Ferris was killed instantly when the 130kg window fell from the penthouse of the Corniche, a luxury tower block on the Albert Embankment in Lambeth, on to the street below.

The court heard that just over a year earlier a window panel had also fallen from the same development. "Miraculously" no one was hurt but no changes were made to the designs as a result, the court heard.

The prosecution, which was brought by the Health and Safety Executive, said Ferris's death was foreseeable and the designers had ignored concerns about the danger of outward-opening windows.

After more than 11 hours of deliberation the jury cleared F+P and the building's design engineers, Wintech Ltd. But it found St James and Lindner Prater had failed in their duty to keep the public safe under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

Gordon Menzies, prosecuting, told the jury it "wasn't an accident waiting to happen … it was an accident that had already happened in August 2017. The prosecution say it was an accident waiting to happen again."

Ferris was killed by the window, which was blown off its hinges when the building was almost complete, the court heard. A restrictor put in place to prevent the window being blown off had been removed.

The designers failed to consider the "catastrophic" consequences if something went wrong with this restrictor, the prosecution said.

Jurors were told that after the first window panel fell from the building the designers failed to use the incident as a reason to "go back to the drawing board". The jury was told of 12 "missed opportunities" where the designers should have considered the risk of the side-hung windows.

All four defendants denied the charges and claimed they had done all that was reasonably practicable to ensure safety.

Menzies told the court: "The wind was sufficiently strong to blow the window open further than 8 and a half inches and the oversailing glass clashed with the frame and, as a result, the hinges were prised off."

It was only after Ferris's death that the design of the windows was changed back to be inward-opening, the court heard. The prosecution said F+P should have known such risks owing to its specialist knowledge of glass-covered buildings.

But lawyers for F+P said it had not been involved in technical issues. They said it had been there to focus on the visual aspects of the design.

F+P, St James and Lindner Prater were approached for comment.

Amonik Melaco (Tyrone Jackson) and Edwin Ray (Mr Bell) in a 1980s-styled production pumped with guts and gusto

PHOTOGRAPH: JOHAN PERSSON

Stage review

Exuberant revival fizzes like a shaken can of soda

Fame the Musical
Theatre Royal Plymouth
★★★★☆

Holly O'Mahony

As a real-life cohort of performers head to Edinburgh hoping to achieve recognition at the fringe, at the other end of the UK a revival of David De Silva's film turned musical breathes fresh life into its own story of fame-hungry students.

With a book by Jose Fernandez, music by Steve Margoshes and lyrics by Jacques Levy, this is a production pumped with guts and gusto. It erupts like a shaken can of soda and comfortably fills the vast stage at Theatre Royal Plymouth, where Fame received its UK (and European) stage premiere in 1995. It's directed and choreographed by Tom Jackson Greaves and fuelled by an exuberant cast, most of whom fulfilled their own dreams of performing on the professional stage several credits ago and are now flourishing.

Shanay Holmes, though a shade young to play Miss Sherman, is the driving force whose narration carries the class – and us – through a four-year cycle at a performing arts school in New York City, while her vocals are the show's dynamite.

Storylines have been tweaked and songs cut, but the production captures the round-the-clock toil and sheer determination of these aspirants. Early number Hard Work sets the scene with movement filling every corner as the gaggle stretch, practise their scales and pirouette across the stage.

Richard Howell's lighting visualises the sense that the students' whole world is a stage by casting a giant spotlight on the fortress of Soutra Gilmour's school set, while life beyond remains in shadow. Nods to the 1980s come in the shape of leg warmers and the sound of squealing tape recorders being rewound.

It doesn't shy away from the story's grittier moments, including the fate of the initially spunky Carmen (Talia Palamathanan), but as in a Greek tragedy, they take place offstage.

It's when the students pool their talents – for the boisterous canteen scene and flashmob to the title track (written by Dean Pitchford and Michael Gore), with its flying jumps and mid-air splits – that it beams brightest. That's when Miss Sherman's message to her students, that success is not a solo endeavour but something to achieve together, rings truest.

Until 15 August

BBC hires Minecraft entrepreneur, 26, to stem loss of gen Z audiences to YouTube

Michael Savage
Media editor

A 26-year-old business prodigy and self-styled gen Z whisperer has been hired by the BBC as it battles to reach young audiences increasingly choosing content creators on YouTube and TikTok over traditional broadcasters.

Brandon Relph, who founded his first company aged 13, and has been praised by the Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak, has joined the BBC's strategy team to help counter the existential threat of falling audiences among young people.

Relph has jokingly described himself as "the go-to guy who knows the youth" and has already had a dizzying career. He made his first £10,000 before the age of 16 with a firm based around the Minecraft video game and founded several other tech and marketing companies as a teenager.

The BBC, along with all broadcasters, is facing a huge generational shift in the way young audiences consume media. While 78% of over-75s still watch live TV on a television in the course of a month, less than half of 16- to 24-year-olds do so, turning instead to content creators on digital platforms such as YouTube.

Matt Brittin, the new director general brought in for his experience in the tech world, has pledged to reshape the BBC as part of the renewal of its royal charter, which is being negotiated with ministers.

Prioritising digital content will be reflected in the major cuts being made across the BBC's services. The corporation is already trying to adapt, recently announcing a deal to produce bespoke YouTube content.

Relph, who previously claimed the title of the UK's youngest ever chief executive, has specialised in talking to executives about marketing to young audiences, stating his businesses have been "built on people's lack of understanding of our generation".

His exploits have included building a large online audience for live video game shows, while his company also built a Minecraft version of a Tesla after he and his business partner met Elon Musk at a convention.

Those familiar with his past entrepreneurial efforts said he had encountered resistance within the media industry to embracing online content creators, which he sees as necessary to reach young audiences. That resistance is now melting away.

Another of his projects, touted as a "Netflix for the creator generation", could not find the venture capital needed. Relph was subsequently hired by the consulting firm Accenture, from where he joined the BBC.

Relph has already started in the BBC's strategy team, with insiders praising his gen Z focus. Previous colleagues described him as a "special case", stating he was popular with his teams and willing to politely question senior executives over their strategy, despite his young age.

▲ *Brandon Relph's hiring by the BBC was labelled a 'much-needed step'*

His appointment has been praised by figures pushing the BBC to take a radically different approach to reaching young audiences, but they also said it needed to reflect a wider effort.

"Brandon looks great – he's somebody who's had a very successful career, done brilliant work and is obviously very talented," said Jordan Schwarzenberger, the manager of the Sidemen YouTube collective. "He's clearly an entrepreneur at heart.

"The BBC's challenge is a bigger issue than one hire. They need to address that institutional media, distributed traditionally, can't reach an audience who have simply gone to other places."

Relph has previously criticised the iPlayer over its user experience and said the "BBC won't have a long-term future" without a greater focus on younger people.

Some in the BBC argue its efforts to adapt to young audiences are already well under way. It is the only UK brand in the top five most used media for the 16-34 age group, alongside YouTube, Instagram, Facebook and Netflix. It still reaches 63% of the age group on average each week. However, BBC figures are acutely aware of the scale of the challenge.

"Brandon's appointment is a much-needed step," said Jo Redfern, a former BBC insider and digital media expert. "The BBC has been foundational in British life and envied around the world, but it risks losing that position with younger [groups] and it would be a shame if that were to happen.

"The BBC's instinct is that of a broadcaster, the very definition of which is one way, at a time when young people demand a participatory relationship with media. Every barrier to that is a reason to go elsewhere and there's no shortage of places to find media that fulfils their needs."

Donald Trump

US judge halts order to hand over financial data in $10bn libel lawsuit

Marina Dunbar

A federal judge has temporarily halted an order requiring Donald Trump to turn over information about his business empire to the BBC as part of a libel lawsuit.

The US district judge Roy Altman issued the temporary pause while he considers Trump's request to revise and narrow parts of his lawsuit against the BBC over a 2024 documentary that aired in the UK.

Trump's legal team sought to stop the discovery order that would have given the BBC access to the president's financial records in the multibillion-dollar case.

Trump has argued the BBC's 2024 documentary about the January 6 attack harmed his business interests. Last month, a judge ruled that Trump would have to begin producing records by 6 August, including information covering the businesses held by the Trump family trust.

On Wednesday, Trump's attorneys asked the court to temporarily suspend that order, arguing the BBC had demanded a "shockingly broad amount of information based on clearly political motivations".

In a four-page order released yesterday, Altman said Trump's effort to remove his claims that the documentary had damaged his businesses could reduce the BBC's need to obtain his financial records. Trump's lawyers are seeking to narrow the claim to alleged reputational harm.

▲ *Trump has argued that a BBC programme on the January 6 attack damaged his business interests*
PHOTOGRAPH: JOSÉ LUIS MAGAÑA/AP

The BBC has argued that Trump's business value remains relevant because his reputation was linked to his success as a businessman.

The broadcaster's lawyers also pointed out that Trump's proposed amended complaint, which has not yet been made public, still seeks $10bn (£7.4bn) in damages. They contend that amount would be difficult to support if the case were based only on reputational harm.

At the centre of the lawsuit is a scene from the BBC documentary Trump: A Second Chance, which edited together portions of Trump's 6 January 2021 speech in a way that made it appear he directly encouraged supporters to attack the US Capitol. The BBC has apologised for the edit but maintains the defamation allegations lack merit.

The lawsuit is part of a series of legal actions Trump has launched against media organisations over coverage he says is defamatory or unfair.

In a separate case, Trump's attorneys argued that his $10bn defamation lawsuit against the Wall Street Journal should proceed to trial after the newspaper reported on a "bawdy" letter the president was said to have contributed to a birthday book for Jeffrey Epstein in 2003.

Trump's justice department also issued subpoenas to New York Times journalists following the newspaper's reporting on security concerns involving the Air Force One presidential aircraft. The department later withdrew those subpoenas.

Police injured at protests over asylum seekers in Thetford

Matthew Weaver

Two men have been arrested after police were injured as they intervened to protect men believed to be asylum seekers from angry mobs trying to break into their homes.

The arrests followed two nights of unrest in Thetford, south Norfolk, involving more than 100 people protesting against plans to house asylum seekers in former military barracks near the market town. The unrest came after the online circulation of properties whose landlords have contact with a government contractor to provide homes for asylum seekers.

On Wednesday Norfolk police said one its male officers was struck by a rock and a female officer was bitten while responding to reports of protesters trying to break into a home in the north of the town.

Both injured officers were taken to hospital, and a third officer was spat at, police said.

A man in his 40s, arrested on suspected public order offences, remains in custody. A second man, Brian Thompson, 68, has been charged with possession of an offensive weapon and will appear at Norwich magistrates court on 25 August.

On Tuesday night officers intervened to protect five men who were being threatened by dozens of protesters, some of whom tried break into a property. Video of the incident showed the men being escorted to safety as protesters shouted abuse. Later officers responded to reports of residents being threatened at two homes in the south of the town.

Norfolk policing powers were boosted in Thetford last night, and public safety measures were imposed.

Terry Jermy, the local Labour MP, who has previously criticised plans to use former barracks at nearby RAF Barnham to house up to 1,000 asylum seekers, condemned the violence and what he called "mob rule".

He said he recognised many of the protesters as locals in video footage he watched of the unrest, but he believed tensions were being "whipped up by outside forces".

E-scooter riders more likely than cyclists to suffer brain injuries

Ian Sample
Science editor

Electric scooter users are three times more likely to suffer traumatic brain injuries than motorcyclists or cyclists, according to an analysis of accidents in England and Wales.

Brain injuries accounted for more than a third of adult injuries on e-scooters and rates of internal organ and blood vessel damage were found to be higher than in motorcyclists or pedal cyclists.

There are about 1m privately-owned e-scooters in the UK but they cannot legally be used on public roads, paths or cycle lanes. Police forces have confiscated thousands of the machines while the government has backed trials of rental e-scooters.

The accident analysis reveals stark sex differences in those most harmed in e-scooter accidents. Women were involved in about a third more collisions than men and were more than twice as likely to report severe injuries. The under-18s were also at risk, accounting for 16% of e-scooter injuries.

The findings have led to calls to make e-scooters more stable and safer, particularly for women who sustain more chest injuries because the handlebars are typically set at a height for men. Mandatory safety training and a requirement to wear a helmet would help, experts said.

David Bodansky, an orthopaedic surgeon at Chelsea and Westminster hospital in London, used the national major trauma registry to analyse injuries from e-scooter, motorbike and bicycle collisions in 18 cities in England and Wales from 2020 to 2022.

▲ *Experts have called for urgent legislation on private e-scooters*

6%

Proportion of e-scooter riders who said they wore a helmet, according to a study in Scientific Reports

E-scooter riders were more than three times as likely to suffer traumatic brain injury or blood vessel damage and 1.5 times more likely to injure internal organs than motorbike riders. E-scooter riders also fared worse than cyclists for these injuries. The risk of bone fractures was lower, however, for e-scooter riders than cyclists or motorcyclists.

The data shed no light on why e-scooters were involved in so many accidents, but Bodansky believes design is a factor.

He said: "If you look at an e-scooter, they've got very small wheels and it's very easy to jam one of those into a pothole. You'll then go head over heels over the front and land on your head."

Less than 6% of e-scooter riders reported wearing a helmet, according to the study in Scientific Reports.

While some research has found that women were more likely to ride e-scooters on the pavement, other research saw no sex differences.

Dr Petya Ventsislavova, a senior lecturer in transport psychology at Nottingham Trent University, found in a 2024 study that more than half of e-scooter riders rode on pavements, and with another person at the same time. Men reported using their phones and shooting red lights more than women.

"These figures highlight the urgent need for comprehensive legislation governing private e-scooters," said Ventsislavova.

The legislation should not only clarify where and how e-scooters could be used, but include mandatory safety training, she said. "Unlike cars and motorcycles, e-scooters were introduced without any requirement for formal training, despite being motorised vehicles," she added.

A Department for Transport spokesperson said: "These are concerning findings, and our thoughts are with anyone who has been injured on our roads. Road safety is our top priority, which is why our e-scooter trials are testing their use in a controlled environment now, before updating the law to ensure they can be used safely more widely."

Milburn says primary schools should monitor pupils who are at risk of becoming jobless

Continued from page 1

intercepting, intervening, supporting, and helping those young people to get on a different path."

The former Labour health secretary said the recommendation would form part of his final report into Britain's youth worklessness crisis, which is expected this autumn.

Britain's young adults are bearing the brunt of a rise in unemployment, with figures in May showing the number of 16- to 24-year-olds who are Neet surpassing a million for the first time in more than 10 years. Representing as many as one in eight young people, the rate has swollen at a significantly faster rate than in other countries amid a sharp rise in mental ill-health and a tough jobs market.

Milburn's review comes as Andy Burnham puts tackling the crisis in youth employment at the top of his agenda, including changes in his first weeks as prime minister to retool technical education and apprenticeships. Labour is also gearing up for a fresh tilt at welfare reform amid concerns over a spiralling benefits bill and the hit to the economy and lives from a prolonged period out of work.

Milburn said welfare reform would form a critical plank of his final report, but cautioned that any steps to restrict benefits payments for young people would need to be accompanied by higher levels of education, health and job support.

He said that by the time a young person reached the benefit system it represented an "upstream failure" in education, skills and health policy because a functioning system could have helped them to find a job.

"I think we've got to turbocharge that education; that support. We've got to turbocharge opportunities for young people; we've got to make it easier for young people to get a job," he said. "And alongside opportunities, of course, there has got to be some obligations. Of course."

Speaking on a fact-finding mission to Ireland, which has recorded the fastest fall in Neet rates in the EU over the past decade, Milburn said that far too often youth disengagement began long before the age of 16.

Suggesting that it can start before a child even reaches the school gates, he highlighted a study in Bradford that found children who were not school-ready at the age of four or five were almost three times as likely to become Neet by the time they reached the age of 16 to 17.

"We know what the correlated factors are [for a child at risk of becoming Neet] – whether that is poverty; mental health, or being in care. What we don't do is take that knowledge and turn it into action."

Under the proposal to be outlined in his final report, schools in England would be expected to flag a child's risk of becoming Neet from the end of primary school, including by drawing on attendance records.

While some schools have strategies using so-called "Roni" (risk of Neet indicator) tools, the practice is not widespread or mandated. "We've got to get upstream because what we're doing is we're paying – this country, and young people – are paying the price of failure."

1m

The number of 16- to 24-year-olds who are Neet has exceeded a million for the first time in 10 years

Ireland's 'secret sauce' Can Britain's neighbour point way on youth crisis?

Richard Partington

Alan Milburn bakes with local children at the Reco Central Youth Facility in Ballymun, Dublin

PHOTOGRAPH: PATRICK BOLGER/THE GUARDIAN

Alan Milburn is guiding a metal loop along the serpentine wire of an electrical buzzer game as he explains the challenge of Britain's youth jobs crisis. "We have got more than a million young people not in education, employment or training [Neet]. Crisis is an overused word – but this is a crisis."

On a fact-finding trip to Dublin, the former UK cabinet minister is being shown around an Irish Rail training facility. He tells the apprentices who rigged up the game that, while things are bad in Britain, Ireland is on the right track.

"It's about half the rate here, it's fallen very rapidly. And we want to try to work out: what is that? Why?"

Over the past decade, Ireland has achieved the fastest reduction in Neet rates anywhere in the EU, from 14.3% in 2015 to 6.1% last year. That compares with a rise from 11.1% to 12.8% in the UK.

As he prepares to publish a report on the crisis for the UK government this autumn, Milburn has brought a delegation of officials, charity leaders and industry bosses with him on the trip across the Irish Sea.

"We're here really to understand what the secret sauce is," he says. "The life chances of young people here are being transformed. You don't have to go far – to the outskirts of Dublin – before you find huge pockets of deprivation and poverty. So nobody here would say: 'We've got it solved.' But there is definitely something different that we can learn from."

In Ireland, part of the reason for the youth jobs turnaround is down to its economic recovery from the 2008 financial crisis. The country was among the biggest global casualties, with a 10% crash in a single year and unemployment at 16% by 2012. Youth joblessness reached almost 30%.

Corey Farrell's dad was among many who left for the UK when his job as a mechanic at the German airline Lufthansa was put at risk. "When that shut down here, he got sniped to go over," says the Irish Rail apprentice. "He's worked over there ever since."

Since then, the economy has bounced back, in part fuelled by big US tech companies taking advantage of low taxes. The country is "100% through the worst", Farrell says. If anything, things have gone too far the other way as living costs surge.

"You can see it more than anything else in how expensive everything here is."

Milburn recognises Ireland's progress is partly driven by economic factors. Still, Britain could still learn a few lessons.

At St Seton's secondary school to the west of central Dublin, teachers tell Milburn how they get extra money from the Irish government to support children at risk of poverty, social exclusion and educational disadvantage.

There is a big focus on technical education and helping students to prepare to enter the world of work.

Sitting in the staff room, the school's principal, Sarah Green, and its career and guidance counsellor, Cheryl Keeler, explain they are agnostic about whether a student progresses to university. Getting a job is more important.

'We're here really to understand. The life chances of young people are being transformed'

Alan Milburn
Former cabinet minister

Work experience is graded as part of the curriculum, while pupils have an opportunity to take a "transition year" (TY) before studying for either an academic or vocational leaving certificate. As an optional scheme, the TY has no curriculum and typically involves work experience and careers guidance, but core subjects have to be covered in some form for two hours a week.

Calum, a student at the school, took a Chinese course for 10 weeks. After completing his applied leaving certificate, from September he will start as an apprentice for Diageo at the Guinness brewery in Dublin. "It was easy thanks to the school," he says.

At Irish Rail, the apprentices say they feel they are on the fast track. Even so, Alyx Tobin says the reputation of apprenticeships in Ireland is similar to Britain. "It was like, if you did an apprenticeship you weren't smart enough to go to college," she says. "But I think that's a stigma that absolutely has to be dismantled as soon as possible."

At a youth centre in the north Dublin suburb of Ballymun, one of the city's most deprived neighbourhoods, Milburn pulls on a plastic apron to bake fairy cakes with local children. The Reco Central Youth Facility is buzzing in the school summer holidays, as a place young people can go to engage in activities. It also provides mental health counselling, careers guidance and job support.

As part of the recommendations for his final report, Milburn will call on the government to drastically boost the level of youth support, with schools expected to help identify and help pupils most at risk of becoming Neet.

"We have got to get upstream because this country, and young people, are paying the price of failure," he says.

Professor in plagiarism row said he landed '1.4m' book deal

Ella Creamer
Lanre Bakare

Jason Arday, the former Cambridge professor accused of plagiarism and embellishment, claimed he was paid "1.4 million" for his forthcoming memoir, which details his extraordinary backstory.

Arday was dogged by questions over his academic work and credentials before resigning on Wednesday night. His departure came after Cambridge announced it would launch an investigation on receiving "new information" about his qualifications and career.

Despite the allegations against Arday, Simon & Schuster has said it is going ahead with the publication of his memoir next week in the US and on 27 August in the UK. Simon & Schuster US told the Guardian last night it was "proceeding with the publication of Great and Unfortunate Things by Jason Arday as planned".

In an interview with the Guardian, Arday had said Simon & Schuster had offered 1.4m in a "pre-empt", a type of deal in which a publisher puts in a high offer to take a book off the table before it can go to auction. Arday did not specify whether the 1.4m figure was in pounds or dollars.

Simon & Schuster did not respond to a request for comment on the sum.

While it is a high figure, publishing sources said it would be plausible if Simon & Schuster US and UK teamed up to buy the book and sought worldwide rights.

One senior publisher said it was an utterly mad number but that "madness sometimes happens".

They said a book such as Arday's would normally be expected to sell about 5,000 copies. With £2 of royalty per copy, that equates to an advance of a much more modest £10,000.

The book recounts the story of Arday's life, from being diagnosed with autism and global developmental delay aged three, to speaking his first words "months before starting secondary school".

He claims to have learned to read and write aged 18, before ultimately becoming the youngest ever Black professor at Cambridge at 37.

Arday has been at the centre of a media storm since late July, when the Telegraph reported that more than 100 passages of his PhD had similarities to a thesis published six years earlier. Doubts have been raised about claims Arday has made about prodigious fundraising feats and a Guardian investigation raised questions about his claims to have been targeted by knife-wielding masked intruders and being sent a pig's head.

Cambridge initially came to Arday's defence, describing the claims as part of a "vile smear campaign". It said it had passed complaints on to Liverpool John Moores University, where Arday completed his PhD.

Liverpool cleared him of plagiarism but academics said legitimate concerns remained.

One publishing executive said Simon & Schuster's decision to stand by its author might simply be because "they had a contract, and they're sticking with the contract". If there was a significant advance involved, there might be more motivation to "recoup" it, the executive added. Pulling the book would be a "pretty massive decision", another publisher said, if only for logistical reasons.

They said Simon & Schuster had "probably printed the book already, probably paid the author, and may have started shipping the book all over the world" and withdrawing it would be "extremely difficult and quite expensive".

In a statement before Arday's resignation, Simon & Schuster said: "We have worked closely with Professor Jason Arday on Great and Unfortunate Things since acquiring it and can speak to the professionalism and integrity he has brought to every stage of the publication.

"Great and Unfortunate Things is Arday's memoir of overcoming remarkable challenges and responding to adversity with resilience. It is told through his own recollections and those of people closest to him."

It said Arday "worked closely with his co-writer, as well as our editorial and legal teams, to carefully research, write and corroborate the narrative".

In comments reported by the Bookseller in April, Kris Doyle, the nonfiction publisher at Simon & Schuster UK, said: "I can promise you've never read a story like this – even the viral news headlines don't do it justice." When asked to share information about the book's fact-checking process, Simon & Schuster responded: "We do not comment on our editorial processes."

Arday is scheduled to speak next month at the Topping bookshop in Edinburgh and at Stroud book festival in November, neither of which responded when asked whether those events would go ahead.

The problem facing Simon & Schuster has echoes of that faced by Penguin after the Salt Path scandal, where Raynor and Moth Winn were accused of fabricating large chunks of their story.

Jobs, sport and charity

Long list of Arday's claims now being scrutinised

Lanre Bakare

Amid accusations of plagiarism, questions have been raised about a long line of claims by Jason Arday, from endurance running, footballing exploits and charity fundraising to academic positions.

Plagiarism

Arday first faced allegations that he plagiarised parts of his PhD thesis late last year. He has rejected the claims. The Telegraph reported that analysis had found more than 100 passages in his PhD were similar to another thesis by Paula Zwozdiak-Myers, a student at Brunel University of London.

An investigation by Liverpool John Moores University, which awarded his PhD, did not uphold the charges of plagiarism, but said mistakes were probably caused by "honest and reasonable error".

Arday told the Guardian last week: "There have been multiple thorough investigations across several institutions as a result of the allegations and immense scrutiny, including with an academic misconduct panel who concluded that there was no plagiarism or academic misconduct."

There have been calls from academics to re-examine his PhD.

Arday has also faced claims that some of his more recently published work is flawed. The Times published analysis on Wednesday that found some of his research contained "impossible" evidence and was littered with inconsistencies.

Academic posts and achievements

Arday has claimed to have held a string of prestigious visiting fellowships and professorships at other universities.

The website for Jesus College, where Arday was a fellow, stated that he had been a visiting professor at the Ohio State University and the University of Glasgow. Both denied this.

The biography also stated that Arday was still an "honorary professor at Durham University in the department of sociology", where he had previously worked. The university told the Daily Mail that he no longer held any role.

Jason Arday's claims about everything from personal threats to charitable feats are now being viewed with suspicion

PHOTOGRAPH: CHRISTIAN SINIBALDI

Cambridge dons call for independent inquiry over appointment

Continued *from page 1*

responsibility for the grotesque racism which this whole business has unleashed, and for the harm done both to the individual in the line of fire, to black academics as a group, and the broader field of critical race studies. This requires accountability now from those responsible, not a cover-up."

Other academics who spoke to the Guardian said they had been surprised by Arday's appointment in 2023, with one sociologist saying they had never heard of Arday before: "When it was announced, I looked for his body of work, and it was disappointing to say the least."

Gopal said Cambridge had been too tempted to "cut corners on the hard work of fostering equality and inclusion" by opting for a media-friendly appointment.

"The extent to which this appointment was paraded in the media by the university … raises questions about whether the university sought public kudos for itself rather than teaching and research from this appointment.

"It is highly unusual, to say the least, to appoint such an early-career academic to a very senior post. Academic misconduct also needs more robust and transparent procedures in place, as more than one case at Cambridge indicates.

"The university must also pay attention to the consequences of putting young people of colour in highly visible places to carry the burden of representation before they are ready to withstand scrutiny."

When the controversy erupted, the university told journalists it stood by its appointment process and publicly defended Arday as "the victim of a vile campaign" to discredit him. But on Wednesday night the university abruptly announced that it would open a fresh investigation after receiving "new information" about his qualifications and appointments.

Shortly afterwards Arday said he would resign, saying: "I no longer wish to feel as though I am living under a constant spotlight, where every aspect of my life is subject to public examination and judgment."

The university and other organisations have since distanced themselves from him by deleting webpages and references. One academic described this as "wiping away the traces". Jesus College and the university's faculty of education have taken down Arday's staff profiles.

Since his Cambridge appointment, Arday addressed a number of commercial organisations, including the Association of British Insurers in 2025.

Simon & Schuster lists Arday as "an internationally sought-after speaker … [who] has travelled across the United States for speaking engagements".

Arday has also claimed to have completed a master's in psychodynamic practices at Birkbeck, University of London.

However, when the Guardian contacted Birkbeck, the university said it had not been able to find records of a student named Jason Arday having studied there.

Arday has claimed to have published a book with Palgrave Macmillan. The publisher subsequently confirmed that they took a proposal from Arday, but the book was never published.

Sport

Arday claims in his book to have run 30 marathons in 35 days to raise money for charity. In 2012, when Arday met tennis star Andy Murray, he told him that he'd had an epileptic seizure during the 20th marathon and fractured his leg. Despite that incident, Arday claimed to have run nine more marathons.

Doctors have told the Guardian that running nine marathons with a hairline fracture in a fibula would be incredibly painful, though technically not impossible. In his forthcoming memoir, Arday says he completed the distance by taking painkillers.

He also claimed at public events to have run 600 miles in six days, an achievement that would make him one of the world's most gifted endurance runners.

He said that because of the "cumulative wear and tear of training" from his previous running challenges he "had to put rest days in between the running days just to finish" the challenge, which was completed over a 12-day period.

Questions have also been raised about Arday's claims in 2024 to have played for Crystal Palace as an under-18, telling the Talking Matters podcast that he spent "a handful of years" at the club.

Crystal Palace said they did not have records dating back to the late 90s and early 00s, when Arday would have been on their books. It has been reported that Arday did play for Lewisham Borough in the Southern Counties East Division One, which is near the bottom of the non-league pyramid.

Charitable work

As well as his endurance running claims, Arday has said that he's completed other charitable work over the last couple of decades.

He has claimed in media interviews to have raised £5m for charities over a 20-year period (sometimes this figure has risen to £5.5m). As his critics have pointed out, £5m raised for charity would be a staggering amount for someone who is not famous. In 2012, Arday said he hoped to raise £250,000 by the time he was 50.

When asked if the £5m figure was accurate, Arday clarified to the Guardian that the money was raised with the help of "many fundraising collectives over a two-decade period". He has also said he is part of a 100-person syndicate. When asked to identify other people who took part in these efforts, Arday said he had signed NDAs preventing him from disclosing that information.

Arday claimed to have visited both South America and west Africa to install water points with the charity WaterAid. The charity said that "out of respect for the people we work with," they never send their volunteers abroad. WaterAid added that it "doesn't encourage or facilitate self-funded visits either".

Intimidation

Arday has undoubtedly been the victim of racist abuse. Cambridge has previously said it was forced to screen the academic's emails.

In a letter to the government minister Jacqui Smith in July 2025, Arday claimed to have been "threatened with a knife, physically assaulted and spat on; [had] rape and death threats being made to him and his family; bananas and bullets being posted to him via the university campus; and corrosive substances and mutilated animals sent to his family home".

In a subsequent interview with the Guardian, Arday claimed to have been confronted at his faculty building on two occasions by a masked man threatening to harm him if he did not resign. On the second occasion, Arday said, the intruder produced a knife.

The intruder was not picked up by CCTV on either occasion and no one in the faculty reported seeing anyone suspicious. Arday did not report either intrusion at the time, telling the Guardian that after the second incident he continued his working day. He did not inform colleagues that a masked man with a knife was in the faculty building.

Arday confirmed in an interview with the Guardian that the "mutilated animals sent to his family home" mentioned in the open letter was a severed pig's head, delivered to his parents' home address in London.

In an interview he claimed the police investigated, checking with butchers in south London if they had sold a pig, eventually finding one that had sold a "whole hog" on the morning the head was left.

When the Guardian checked those details with the local butchers, they said no police asked about a pig.

When the details Arday gave were checked by police, the Guardian was told no investigation had taken place.

Arday reported a journalist investigating claims against him to the police. Jack Grove, a reporter at the Times, approached Arday with a 63-page report detailing alleged plagiarism. In a piece for the publication, Grove writes that he "submitted only three polite emails", but received a threatening letter from Arday's solicitors.

Four months later he was phoned by a Metropolitan police officer to say they were closing the complaint against him - a complaint he did not know had been made. "Were my inquiries grounds for a criminal complaint? That was hugely troubling to me as a reporter who specialises in examining issues of research integrity and ethics," Grove wrote.

The Guardian

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Almost 50 people deported under 'one in, one out' scheme have returned to UK

Diane Taylor

Almost 50 asylum seekers deported using the "one in, one out" scheme have been recorded as returning to the UK a second time, the Guardian has learned.

It is believed that in addition to the 49 returnees detained by the Home Office, an unknown number are likely to have arrived in the UK undetected.

The scheme, which began last September, allows the British government to return people arriving on small boats to France, in exchange for a similar number of asylum seekers being brought to the UK legally. The aim is to deter asylum seekers from crossing the Channel in small boats.

The Guardian previously revealed that the first asylum seeker who returned to the UK a second time did so last October, a few weeks after being forcibly returned to France. But until now the number of people returning to the UK after forced returns was not known.

So far this year small boat crossings have declined by about 43% compared with the same period last year. This fall was probably due to factors including bad weather and a reduction of about a third in the number of migrants arriving in Europe overall, as well as UK and French efforts to disrupt people smugglers.

The rationale for sending a proportion of small boat arrivals back to France is that it is a safe country. But asylum seekers who have subsequently returned to the UK have argued that they faced threats from people smugglers in France, or feared being returned by French authorities to their home countries or to countries they passed through.

About 4% of small boat arrivals have been returned to France so far under the one in, one out deal.

According to the Home Office, as of 30 June, 1,117 individuals had been transferred to the UK and 1,087 individuals returned to France under the scheme. Officials said the treaty between the UK and France had been amended so that second-time returnees to the UK would be once again returned to France.

One asylum seeker who returned to the UK a second time, in a lorry, was eventually returned to France after spending five months in detention. He said he was accommodated for only a few days by French authorities.

43%

Decline in small boat crossings to the UK so far this year, compared with the same period last year

"There is nowhere for asylum seekers to go and be safe and have peace in Europe," he said. "I'm sleeping on the streets of Paris because France wants to send me back to Bulgaria, where I was fingerprinted. I was better off in a UK detention centre."

Griff Ferris, of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants, said: "People fleeing war, persecution and climate destruction are forced to take incredibly dangerous routes to cross the Channel and get to the UK because there is no other way.

"We must let everyone access the same safe routes to travel that are open to so many, like the daily ferries between Calais and Dover."

A Home Office spokesperson said: "Anyone looking to return to the UK after being removed under the UK-France agreement is wasting their time and money – and will be removed again.

"Under our payment-by-results returns agreement with France, we have removed more than 1,000 illegal migrants from British soil. Hundreds of enforcement actions … have been pursued against migrant-smuggling networks since the election, and we've returned or removed almost 70,000 illegal migrants."

France's interior ministry was approached for comment.

Farmer jailed for killing his lodger and hiding body in concrete

Raphael Boyd

A man who killed his lodger and concealed his dismembered body in a barrel filled with concrete for more than five years has been jailed for a minimum of 35 years.

Christopher Wright, a 73-year-old farmer from South Yorkshire, was convicted last month in Sheffield crown court of murdering Richard Dyson, 55, in 2019.

Dyson had been living in his car on Wright's farm in Hoyland and had been doing jobs for the then 67-year-old when the pair had a falling out.

Wright, an antique firearms collector who was described as a "weapons fanatic" during his trial, suspected Dyson of stealing some of his prized possessions and selling them.

The court heard that when Wright confronted Dyson with his suspicions in November 2019 an argument broke out that ended with Dyson being shot in the chest and arm with a shotgun, killing him.

Wright, a former butcher, dismembered Dyson's body over the course of several days, then placed the remains in a barrel which he filled with concrete. He then placed the barrel in a trailer and asked an unsuspecting neighbour to keep the vehicle on their property.

Wright was aided in covering up his crime by Karl Schwalbe, a lifelong friend, who received a three-year sentence for conspiracy to pervert the course of justice.

Dyson's disappearance was initially treated as a missing person inquiry and his remains went undiscovered for more than five and a half years.

While South Yorkshire police were aware he had been on Wright's land before his disappearance, they could not find evidence implicating the farmer.

Dyson remained missing until last July when police, driven by new evidence that showed Wright had contacted a local farmer about storing a vehicle on his property in the days after Dyson disappeared, searched the farm and found a barrel containing concrete and human remains.

Speaking after sentencing him yesterday, Mr Justice Cotter told Wright he would probably die in prison and said the killer's experience as a butcher made him "skilled enough to do such a terrible thing, something few ordinary people would have the stomach for".

Christopher Wright, a former butcher, dismembered his lodger's body before hiding it inside a barrel

Dance review

Gravitas, grace and a superstar's charisma

Carlos Acosta: Myths and Modern Masters
Royal Opera House, London
★★★★☆

Sanjoy Roy

Patterns of give and take: Carlos Acosta and Amisaday Naara in Nosotros. Below, Acosta as Othello in The Moor's Pavane

It's a bit of a stretch to call this enjoyable programme Myths and Modern Masters but granted, it sounds better than Miscellany. Carlos Acosta – superstar dancer, now director of Birmingham Royal Ballet and the Cuban company Acosta Danza – has chosen dancers from both companies to offer a very eclectic spread of dance, and added himself into the mix.

At 53, Acosta may not have the physical prowess of his youth, but he brings great presence and depth – and some great dancing, too. That serves very well in José Limón's 1949 work The Moor's Pavane, a distillation of Shakespeare's Othello that boils down the story to four characters – Othello (Acosta), Desdemona (Beatrice Parma), Iago (Max Maslen) and Emilia (Miki Mizutani) – and contains their drama of deception, jealousy and revenge within a stately composition of measured steps and stylised gestures, set to courtly music by Purcell.

Nosotros, an intimate duet by the Cuban choreographers Beatriz García and Raúl Reinoso, also benefits from Acosta's gravitas. Backed by plangent piano and cello, Acosta and Amisaday Naara enact the complex yet everyday dynamics of a longstanding couple: patterns of give and take, small gestures of tenderness or neglect.

In his own Nutracker in Havana Suite, Acosta casts himself as a fatherly magician to young Clara (Aila Acosta Holland – yes, his own daughter), conjuring up scenes of delight familiar from Act 2 of the traditional Nutcracker. It's nicely danced and ends with the classic pas de deux as if to say: there's your pinnacle. Yet it is topped by a show-stopping performance of Agrippina Vaganova's 1935 Diana and Actaeon pas de deux, Katherine Ochoa and Yasiel Hodelín Bello almost superhuman in their whirls, bounds and balances.

The evening closes with Christopher Bruce's Rooster, set to songs by the Rolling Stones. It's the one piece that doesn't quite play to Acosta's strengths, because the choreography itself is fired by the freshness of youth, yet to be weathered by experience. Acosta has moved beyond that.

Until Sunday

PHOTOGRAPHS: TRISTRAM KENTON/THE GUARDIAN

Raleigh bicycle brand faces chop after parent firm fails to find buyer

Jasper Jolly

At its height, Raleigh made 1m bicycles per year at its factory in Nottingham, employing more than 8,000 people

PHOTO: DON MCPHEE/ THE GUARDIAN

The bicycle company that owns the historic Raleigh brand has started insolvency proceedings after failing to find a buyer.

The Netherlands-based Accell Group said on Wednesday that it had called in administrators after it failed to find a viable solution to continue its operations in their current form.

Raleigh was founded in 1887 and grew to be the biggest bike manufacturer in the world. At its height it was making 1m bicycles per year at its factory in Nottingham and employed more than 8,000 people.

However, after models such as the Chopper, Grifter and Burner bikes in the 1970s and 1980s, Raleigh lost market share and it stopped making bikes in England in 2002.

It was bought in 2012 for $100m (£74m) by Accell, which also owns the Lapierre and Ghost bicycle brands, ending 125 years as a British-owned company.

The fate of the Raleigh brand, which still retained offices in Nottinghamshire, will now be decided by administrators.

Accell previously described itself as the European market leader in e-bikes and the second-largest in bicycle parts and accessories, with the vast majority of the group's production moved to Hungary, where costs were 30% below those of its previous Dutch factories.

However, European bike and parts makers have come under relentless pressure from Chinese rivals in recent decades, leading to fewer and fewer survivors. Accell was bought in 2022 in a €1.4bn (£1.2bn) buyout by the US private equity firm KKR, which hoped to capitalise on the renewed interest in cycling in cities around the world. Cities have built cycle lanes to encourage exercise and to cut congestion and pollution, while e-bikes have opened up cycling to people with different physical abilities.

The KKR purchase came at the height of the coronavirus pandemic, when demand for bikes soared from people locked down in their local areas. However, the industry was unable to adjust quickly enough, increasing output massively, only to find it had missed the wave. That left manufacturers with lots of stock that needed to be offloaded at a discount.

KKR hoped to cut costs and share operations between several different brands. In February, it was forced to hand over the business to creditors, a group of undisclosed European banks and investors. The new owners tried to agree a takeover with Dutech Holdings through the Singapore-based industrial group's subsidiary Tri Star Group, but those talks came to nothing.

Jonas Nilsson, the chief executive of Accell, said: "This is a deeply sad and frustrating situation given all the hard work and everything we have achieved, with the support of shareholders and lenders, to restructure Accell's operations and finances.

"It is an especially difficult moment for our employees, creditors, customers, suppliers, and partners. Every realistic option for the future of the business has been tirelessly explored, and none have resulted in a solution to continue the group in its current form.

"Our immediate focus is to support an orderly process, provide clarity wherever possible, and work with the relevant court-appointed administrators to preserve viable activities and employment where circumstances allow."

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Safe harbour?

Pollution fear over £150m Falmouth dock development

A computer generated image of the scheme. Residents of Falmouth, below, are concerned about the environmental impact that the proposed dock redevelopment and extra visitors could have on the town

PHOTOGRAPHS: ABBIE TRAYLER-SMITH/THE GUARDIAN; BALAENA

Steven Morris

Janavi Kramer had just enjoyed a swim with friends and was sitting on a bench taking in a wonderful Cornish view - headlands plunging into deep water, bobbing boats, a bustling harbour town.

"We're lucky to have this space," said Kramer, an artist and scientific illustrator. "We use it for work, recreation and pleasure and it's so scary to think that this could all be harmed. I worry about what we may be living with soon and what we'll be leaving for future generations."

She is talking about a £150m plan to redevelop Falmouth Docks in south-west Cornwall. It includes expanding the docks to allow larger cruise ships to berth, which many people worry will exacerbate environmental problems and put pressure on the fabric of the town.

Hannah Cocks, a marine social scientist, who had been taking a dip with Kramer, said she wasn't opposed to redevelopment of the docks, which have been here for more than 150 years.

"But I want it to be done in a way that is environmentally and socially just," she said. "The community has not been adequately consulted about a decision that could have such adverse effects.

"Even now Cornish infrastructure can't cope with the number of people who come in the summer. Do we really need these huge cruise ships here?"

The plans also involve dredging around the docks, which some fear could lead to heavy metals washed into the harbour when Cornwall was a mining superpower and toxic paints once used to protect boat hulls, being churned up from the seabed.

Fishers and environmentalists are warning that precious habitats could be damaged, including oyster grounds and rare maerl beds - created when rare types of red seaweeds grow into hard, twig-like lumps.

Gio Reale, a wildlife storyteller, said it had been a good summer for spotting marine wildlife. "I normally go out looking for sharks. We have seen small-spotted catsharks and nursehounds, quite a few octopuses and a lot of the usual lobsters and pipefish.

Jason Pascoe, an oyster fisher, and Hannah Cocks, right, a marine social scientist and keen swimmer, worry about toxic waste and increased demands on infrastructure

PHOTOGRAPH: ABBIE TRAYLER-SMITH/THE GUARDIAN

> ***'We use it for work, recreation and pleasure and it's so scary to think that this could all be harmed'***
>
> **Janavi Kramer**
> *Scientific illustrator*

"We have maerl beds, seagrass meadows, kelp here. It's a beautiful but fragile ecosystem and I'm concerned it could be really badly harmed," he said.

The government is supporting the redevelopment. Falmouth already hosts cruises, but ministers say the expansion will allow larger vessels - such as Excellence Class cruise ships, which are up to 345 metres (1,131ft) long, to berth.

This could help to attract up to 200,000 cruise visitors annually by 2030, it says, injecting millions of pounds into the local economy and supporting hundreds of tourism-related jobs.

Cornwall council will debate elements of the scheme in the coming weeks but much of it is going through the planning process under the government's fast track system, designed to push complicated developments through and cut red tape.

It means developers work with a single, lead environmental body - in this case the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) - rather than what the UK government calls a "merry-go-round of overlapping regulators".

But many in the town worry that fast-tracking may lead to a lack of scrutiny.

Jem Wallis, who runs a sauna on the waterfront, said he didn't feel a clear case had been made for the project. And he had never had a cruise passenger visit his sauna: "It all seems a massive risk to me."

Zoe Young, a tour guide, said: "A terminal for stinky great ships to meet stinky coaches to Land's End - is that the best we can hope for?"

When the Guardian visited John Spargo's souvenir shop Tall Ships Trading on Church Street, a debate about the pros and cons broke out. Spargo said most cruise passengers who arrive in the town were taken by coach to other attractions such as the Eden Project. "They don't bring as much money into the town itself as you think."

Bernie, a visitor from Kent, said she thought cruise ships were dreadful. "Other places in Europe are trying to get rid of them. Why do you want bigger ones? It's not worth losing the character of this place for cruise ships."

Susie, who lives in Falmouth, disagreed. "They do bring in money. They are good for many of the shops and the boat tours do well when they come. St Mawes Ferry is always packed when a cruise ship is here. The passengers say they don't feel they are on a real boat when they're on a cruise ship so love getting on a little one."

The government has said the fast track system does not mean corners are being cut. It said the MMO was reviewing information submitted during the consultation period to support a "robust" marine licensing decision.

A spokesperson said: "The lead environmental regulator model is about ensuring better coordination between developers and environmental regulators to prevent delays in the planning process without lowering environmental standards."

Balaena, the maritime engineering and shipbuilding group that operates the docks, said the project would ensure the port remained fit for purpose, safeguard skilled jobs, create apprenticeship opportunities and support businesses across Cornwall and the wider south-west.

It said "targeted pocket dredging" was needed around the dock, which had been subject to a comprehensive environmental impact assessment. There would be no dredging in the main docks channel or wider estuary and material that is not suitable for disposal at sea would be taken to a facility inland.

Jason Pascoe, who has worked the oyster fishery for almost 40 years, was unconvinced. "The river systems here are very complex. Can they be sure if they dump waste out to sea it won't find its way back here? Ironically, we've just had our best ever season. This feels like a horrendous threat to me."

PM 'personally intervened' over early release of grooming gang members

Rajeev Syal
Home affairs editor

Andy Burnham's government is "urgently" identifying any grooming gang perpetrators who may still be eligible for early prison release after concerns were raised about a potential loophole in the system.

A spokesperson for the prime minister said he had "personally intervened" after men convicted of assaulting children in Bradford were expected to be freed early despite a promise earlier this week that they would remain locked up.

No 10 said it would ensure that "everything possible is being done so that vile groomers are dealt with in the way their victims deserve".

About 5,000 people are expected to be released early under sentencing changes, down from 6,000 after ministers excluded grooming gang members, rapists and "serious" child sex offenders from the scheme, which starts in October and is designed to tackle overcrowding in jails.

But critics have questioned the scope of exemptions after reports that some men convicted in relation to historical grooming gang cases could be among those freed.

Some of the offending took place before sexual abuse laws were changed in 2003, and the perpetrators were charged with crimes including indecent assault, which does not fall within the exclusions to the scheme.

A spokesperson for Burnham said: "As part of the review of sentences, the prime minister asked the Ministry of Justice to conduct an in-depth review of cases to ensure that grooming cases were identified.

"This work is happening urgently. This is extremely important to the PM and he has personally intervened to ensure everything possible is being done so that vile groomers are dealt with in the way their victims deserve."

Burnham suspended the scheme in his second week as prime minister after coming under intense pressure from MPs, victims, campaigners and prison staff to halt the early release of serious sexual and violent offenders.

Prisons have become a major point of political contention, with Labour blaming the Tories for creating the overcrowding crisis between 2010 and 2024 by increasing sentences while failing to build enough jails.

The leader of the Conservative party, Kemi Badenoch, wrote to Burnham yesterday demanding answers on which offences would be eligible for early release and accusing the government of "yet another betrayal of the victims".

> ***'He asked for an in-depth review to ensure grooming cases were identified'***
>
> **Spokesperson**
> *No 10 Downing Street*

As first disclosed by the Times, there are a number of cases where men who were convicted of assaulting children in Bradford, as part of historical investigations into Asian grooming gangs, were not excluded from the early release scheme as their cases took place before the anti-grooming laws were introduced.

The men were charged with indecent assault, which does not fall within the exemptions.

Elsewhere, the government has resisted pressure to exempt two of PC Andrew Harper's killers from early release, as the boss of his former force considers joining a potential legal challenge over the plans.

Under the early release scheme, Jessie Cole and Albert Bowers could be freed halfway through their 13-year sentences for manslaughter.

Harper sustained fatal injuries after getting caught in a strap attached to the back of a car and being dragged down a country road as Cole, Bowers and Henry Long fled the scene of a quad bike theft in Sulhamstead, Berkshire.

Long, the driver of the car, received a 16-year sentence and will not be eligible for release under the scheme.

The chief constable of Thames Valley police, Jason Hogg, said he was receiving legal advice on whether the force could join a legal challenge mooted by the local Police Federation chief, Aileen O'Connor, to prevent Cole and Bowers being freed.

The prime minister has said he had wanted to "go further" with the exemptions after ordering a review of the scheme, but that this was "not possible without the prison system reaching capacity and collapsing".

Stage review

Content still shocks but at least this one's not a musical

The Silence of the Lambs
Curve, Leicester
★★★☆☆

Mark Lawson

▲ *John Partridge, as Hannibal Lecter, avoids Anthony Hopkins's 'hissy lip-sipping' in the film*
PHOTOGRAPH: MARC BRENNER

Soon after the hostile reception of the theatrical version of Trainspotting, another landmark 1990s movie, The Silence of the Lambs, attempts a similar manoeuvre.

But in this case, director Nikolai Foster is surely sensible not to turn this source material into a musical. And adapter Gina Gionfriddo is working not from Jonathan Demme's film but Thomas Harris's 1988 novel about the dangerous interrogation of the psychotic psychiatrist Dr Hannibal Lecter by the FBI rookie Clarice Starling for his insight into a serial killer called Buffalo Bill.

The biggest risk of theatricalised movies is that the acting becomes a form of karaoke. Mollie Gallagher, making a confident stage debut in effectively the lead role, echoes Foster's Virginia accent and ramps up the pugnacious posture and walk.

John Partridge's Lecter is more sonically American than Anthony Hopkins's variation on his Welsh register (the character is actually Lithuanian), avoids the hissy lip-sipping and also injects less charm and culture.

Another jeopardy of staged films is that much of a cinema director's job is moving the camera in, out and around while the frame of a stage is essentially a default wide shot. Foster, however, impressively varies the perspective. He creates a sort of split screen by bracketing the main scene with silent tableaux of other characters.

In the Lecter-Starling scenes, Howard Hudson's lighting subtly directs our gaze, encouraging a tight focus. Careful placing of characters also allows a clever approximation of a two-character shot. The genre-standard autopsy scene feels rawly appalling when played downstage without the protection of a multiplex screen or the camera choosing and cutting away from views. The brief touch between the two main characters also electrifies live.

But, for all Foster's imaginative presentation of the action, the content can feel queasy. The Buffalo Bill strand, sometimes more a main than subplot, means that much of the evening consists of watching women stalked and tortured.

Gionfriddo is a front-rank dramatist – twice a Pulitzer prize finalist, including for Becky Shaw, a London success – and intelligently addresses this problem. Stressing the pervasive sexism of the 1983 setting, she also, reflecting changes in attitudes across the four decades since novel and film, gives the female victims – neatly differentiated by Lottie Amor – more plot-time and agency.

A shocking new line (which is spoken twice) reflects the devastating calculations that a victim may make with the aim of survival.

Most daringly, while all versions of the Lecter-Starling narrative have considered it as a sort of love story, the stage version maximises the romantic context, albeit on a scale from warped to desperate.

A risk of such crossovers is that they will encourage streamer searches for the film instead, but it's a show worth seeing.

Until 15 August, then touring

Woman appears in court over Covent Garden stabbings

PA Media

A woman appeared in court yesterday accused of stabbing four men in the back with a pair of scissors in Covent Garden in central London.

Stella Gollovena, 47, is accused of attacking Patrick De Barr, Thomas Harding, Adrian Lovett and Mantas Jankus on Wednesday lunchtime.

She has been charged with four counts of wounding with intent to cause grievous bodily harm and one count of possession of an offensive weapon, a pair of scissors.

Gollovena, of no fixed address, faced the five criminal charges for the first time in a hearing at Highbury Corner magistrates court.

The hearing was told that police were flagged down in Endell Street, in a busy tourist area filled with bars, theatres and restaurants, at about 12.25pm by one of the victims.

He and a second man reported being stabbed, leading to the suspect being chased and Tasered.

The court heard that police took statements from four men who were treated in hospital for stab wounds to their backs. A fifth person told officers they had also been stabbed but did not want to give a statement.

It is alleged that Gollovena had a pair of scissors – also described as a pair of shears – on her when arrested.

Tan Ikram, the deputy chief magistrate, remanded Gollovena in custody until the next hearing at Snaresbrook crown court on 3 September.

Gollovena spoke to confirm her identity but did not enter any pleas to the charges.

Prevent referrals reach record level fuelled by rise of extreme right

Rajeev Syal

A record number of people have been referred to the government's anti-terror programme in England and Wales, with a 39% rise in a year including a 42% rise in referrals for extreme right-wing ideology, according to official data released yesterday.

A total of 10,293 referrals – up from 7,408 – were made to the Prevent programme in the year to September 2025, which is the highest number since records began 11 years ago.

Those referrals to the scheme, which aims to stop people turning to terrorism, involved 9,957 people suspected of extremist or violent tendencies.

The rise came after officials noted a sustained and significant increase in referrals since the Southport attack in July 2024.

Axel Rudakubana, who killed three girls at a dance class and tried to murder eight others, as well as two adults, had been referred to Prevent three times but his case was closed over his lack of a clear ideology.

The figures showed 2,103 Prevent referrals were because of concerns over extreme rightwing ideology – 20% of the total – up from 1,480 in the previous 12 months. There were 860 referrals (8%) about Islamist extremism, down from 945 over the previous year.

Where age was known, 11- to 15-year-olds made up the largest proportion of Prevent referrals (3,655 or 36%), followed by 16- to 17-year-olds (1,379 or 13%), the Home Office said.

A total of 818 referrals (8%) related to fascination with extreme violence or mass casualty attacks, 95 (1%) were for "incel" extremism – meaning "involuntary celibate", the term given to a strand of misogynist ideology – and 32 (0.3%) for leftwing extremism, while 353 (3%) were for multiple ideologies with no dominant ideology identified.

Fifty-six per cent of referrals to the scheme were for individuals with no identified ideology.

The Home Office has also published data showing the ethnicity of referrals to the Prevent programme, although the data is incomplete because it is not mandatory on the referral form.

Of 5,315 people referred to the scheme, 3,600 (68%) were white, 949 (18%) were Asian, 401 (8%) were black and 365 (7%) were listed as "other".

After initial screening and assessment, Prevent referrals who are deemed at risk of radicalisation may be passed to a multi-agency "channel panel". Chaired by local authorities, these panels determine the extent of a person's susceptibility to radicalisation, and whether a tailored package of support is necessary to address the risk.

Of the 1,100 referrals taken on as a channel case in the year to September 2025 where ethnicity was known, 835 (76%) were white, 159 (14%) were Asian, 59 (5%) were black and 47 (4%) were "other".

Nearly one in five of those referred to the programme – 18% – were autistic, while 36% had at least one mental health or neurodiversity condition listed on their Prevent record.

Jacob Smith, the team leader on freedom of expression and belief at Rights & Security International (RSI), said there was a shocking number of autistic people who now had long-lasting police records under a secretive programme.

"There is no excuse for unleashing this much suspicion against autistic people," he said.

The security minister, Dan Jarvis, said the record number of referrals underlined the scale of the challenge faced in protecting the public from terrorism.

"The statistics also show the crucial role the programme plays in keeping the public safe, with more than 6,000 people moved away from violent ideologies that could have resulted in harm to themselves or others," he said.

Jarvis added: "We will continue to improve Prevent to ensure it has the tools it needs to do its job of stopping people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism.

"We all have a role to play in keeping each other safe and spotting the signs of radicalisation," the security minister said.

The scheme in numbers

39%
The rise in referrals to the Prevent programme in England and Wales in the year to September 2025

9,957
Number of people referred to the anti-terror scheme over suspicion of extremist or violent tendencies

42%
Increase in the number of referrals made because of concerns about extreme rightwing ideology

Nandy's approval means Paramount-Warner Bros deal moves a step closer

Michael Savage
Media editor

The culture secretary, Lisa Nandy, has said she will not intervene in Paramount's proposed acquisition of Warner Bros Discovery, removing one of the remaining obstacles to the blockbuster deal.

Paramount has made significant concessions in order to secure the UK government's backing for the $110bn (£85bn) takeover, which will create a global media powerhouse and bolster the influence of Paramount's chief executive, David Ellison.

Nandy's decision to order Britain's media and competition watchdogs to examine the deal in June came as a shock. However, she has now approved the deal with conditions attached around protecting UK-based content. The UK's Competition and Markets Authority has also cleared the deal, which has already been supported by the EU.

Under the UK guarantees, Paramount's Channel 5 will continue to operate as a public service broadcaster until the end of 2034. Channel 5 News will retain its editorial independence and will remain separate from other news operations covered by the merger, CBS News and CNN International.

Paramount has agreed its linear and on-demand services in Britain would retain distinct editorial identities for five years, including its children's TV content.

Nandy's department also secured a guarantee that the deal would not reduce the number of people commissioning content in Britain, while Channel 5 would continue to back UK-originated content covering drama, factual and entertainment shows.

Nandy will meet Paramount executives "in the coming weeks" to seek assurances about the deal's impact on Britain's wider creative industries.

It means Ellison is a step closer to closing the deal, which would create a group encompassing the Hollywood studios behind franchises including Superman, Batman and Top Gun, the UK's Channel 5, news channel CNN and TNT Sports.

The acquisition still faces a final major hurdle before being completed, following a legal challenge by a coalition of US states and writers' guilds to block it.

There are also concerns within the media about the potential impact on the news coverage of Warner's global news network, CNN. Paramount's own network, CBS News, has faced layoffs, tensions and claims of political interference to push coverage in line with Donald Trump's agenda.

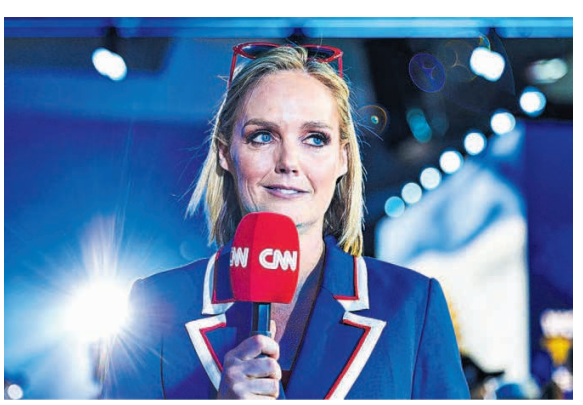
Ellison, the son of the tech mogul and Trump ally Larry Ellison, has faced other accusations of attempting to curry favour with the White House as he pursued acquisitions. However, in a recent essay, he denied having a pro-Trump bias.

"I have regularly voted for candidates of both parties," he wrote. "I hold some views that would be called conservative and others that would be called liberal, just like most Americans."

Responding to the UK government's decision to clear the deal, Paramount said in a statement: "These clearances recognise that the combination of Paramount and WBD will enhance consumer choice and enable a creative-first company to invest in more projects and bring stories to audiences worldwide."

▲ *The Harry Potter films, top, are among Warner's jewels. Above, Lisa Nandy*

MAIN PHOTOGRAPH: WARNER BROS



▲ *David Ellison, right, with actor Jay Ellis, at the UK premiere of Top Gun: Maverick; left, CNN reporter Amanda Davies covering the Fifa World Cup*

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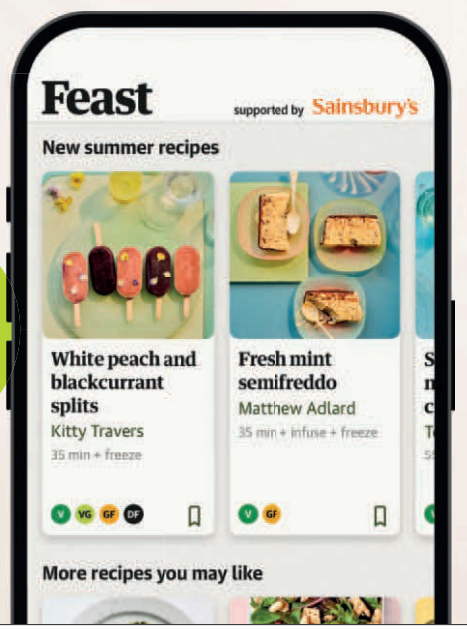

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The Guardian

Breaking the cycle Inside the scheme that gives offenders an alternative to a jail term

Tom Pilston
Haroon Siddique

As the prison overcrowding crisis shows no sign of abating and the debate over early releases rages, an initiative in the West Midlands offers an alternative to custodial sentences.

The Guardian was given rare access to the project under which offenders work on the improvement of waterways and green spaces around Smethwick instead of being sent to jail.

It is a small part of the community payback scheme, through which an estimated 5m hours of work were clocked up across England and Wales in the last year.

Community payback is not suitable for everyone but covers a wide range of adult offending and can be imposed as part of a suspended sentence. The Sentencing Act, which received royal assent in January, introduces a presumption that courts will suspend custodial sentences of 12 months or less, meaning more offenders will carry out community-based punishments.

When the Guardian visited the Smethwick project last month, the temperature was already in the high 20s by 9.30am as participants arrived at the canal for a day of strimming and cutting back overgrown vegetation, as well as clearing beer cans, plastic bags, bottles and condoms from the towpath and the canal itself.

Among them was Steve Warmer, a 54-year-old with a painful hip who was dressed in a grey tracksuit. He was recently convicted of an offence that can attract a fine, a driving ban and up to six months in prison. As two of his fellow participants were given nets to trawl the canal for rubbish and thick, green duckweed, Warmer was handed a litter picker and the first of many black rubbish bags.

'I actually enjoy this work. It gives me knowledge of life and other people'

Steve Warmer
Project participant

▲ *Top, project supervisor Mo Ghatnoor leads a community payback group clearing rubbish and overgrown vegetation along the canal in Smethwick, West Midlands; left, Ghatnoor helps a participant with a strimmer; right, Steve Warmer with his litter picker*

PHOTOGRAPH: TOM PILSTON/ THE GUARDIAN

Warmer, a factory worker from Dudley, said he was "the last one standing [alive]" from his group of friends. He said: "I actually enjoy this work. It gives me knowledge of life and other people."

The aim of community payback is to combine punishment with rehabilitation. Warmer added: "Me and my wife now litter pick in our own street."

Not everyone working at the canal was as positive as Warmer, who had completed 126 hours of his 250-hour community payback sentence. In the hot weather, the work was particularly demanding, with plenty of water breaks needed.

Courts can order between 40 and 300 hours of community payback to be completed within a specific timeframe. Offenders who are unemployed must work up to 28 hours a week over three or four days. For those in employment, the work is organised around their working hours. Failure to comply without reasonable excuse can result in enforcement action and a return to court.

The supervisor at the Smethwick project on the day Warmer was there was Mo Ghatnoor, who spent 10 years as a corporate banker. His responsibilities now include driving the van that takes offenders and equipment to the site.

"This is 100% more fulfilling," he said. "I used to help businesses with profit but I was just a voice on the phone. Here I make a difference in the heart of my own community. I help my own mental health and that of others, the community and individuals."

Other forms of community payback, formerly known as community sentences, include removing graffiti, decorating public places and buildings such as community centres, and planting trees.

Anyone can nominate a project for the scheme, provided it benefits the local community, does not take paid work from others, and makes no profit for anyone.

Among the offenders who will spend less time in prison and more time in the community as a result of the Sentencing Act are burglars, shoplifters and people convicted of assault.

The latest statistics, from July to September 2024, show that adults released after serving sentences of less than 12 months had a reoffending rate of 68.2%, compared with 22.9% among those who had served sentences of 12 months or more.

Critics might see community payback as a soft sentencing option, but Ghatnoor does not share that view. "We look at the individual to whom it gives a structure to their life," he said. "It often breaks a negative cycle and changes their mindset, and therefore brings reoffending down."

Baby born after mother died in fall from ninth-floor window

Raphael Boyd

A pregnant woman who died from a nine-storey fall had her baby safely delivered 30 minutes after her death, an inquest has heard.

Emma Atkinson, 38, was seven months pregnant when she fell from the window of her father's flat in Shakespeare Towers in the Burmantofts area of Leeds, on 22 October 2024. Wakefield coroner's court heard yesterday that Atkinson was pronounced dead by paramedics who arrived at the scene shortly after she fell at 10.20am. Atkinson's body was taken to Leeds General Infirmary, where an emergency caesarean section was performed.

▲ *The woman fell from her father's flat in Shakespeare Towers, Leeds*

The baby girl was born soon after arriving at the hospital. She sustained some injuries from the fall, including a punctured lung and fractured tibia, requiring her to remain in intensive care for the first weeks of her life, but has since recovered. The girl, who is now 21 months old, is reportedly "being raised happily" by relatives.

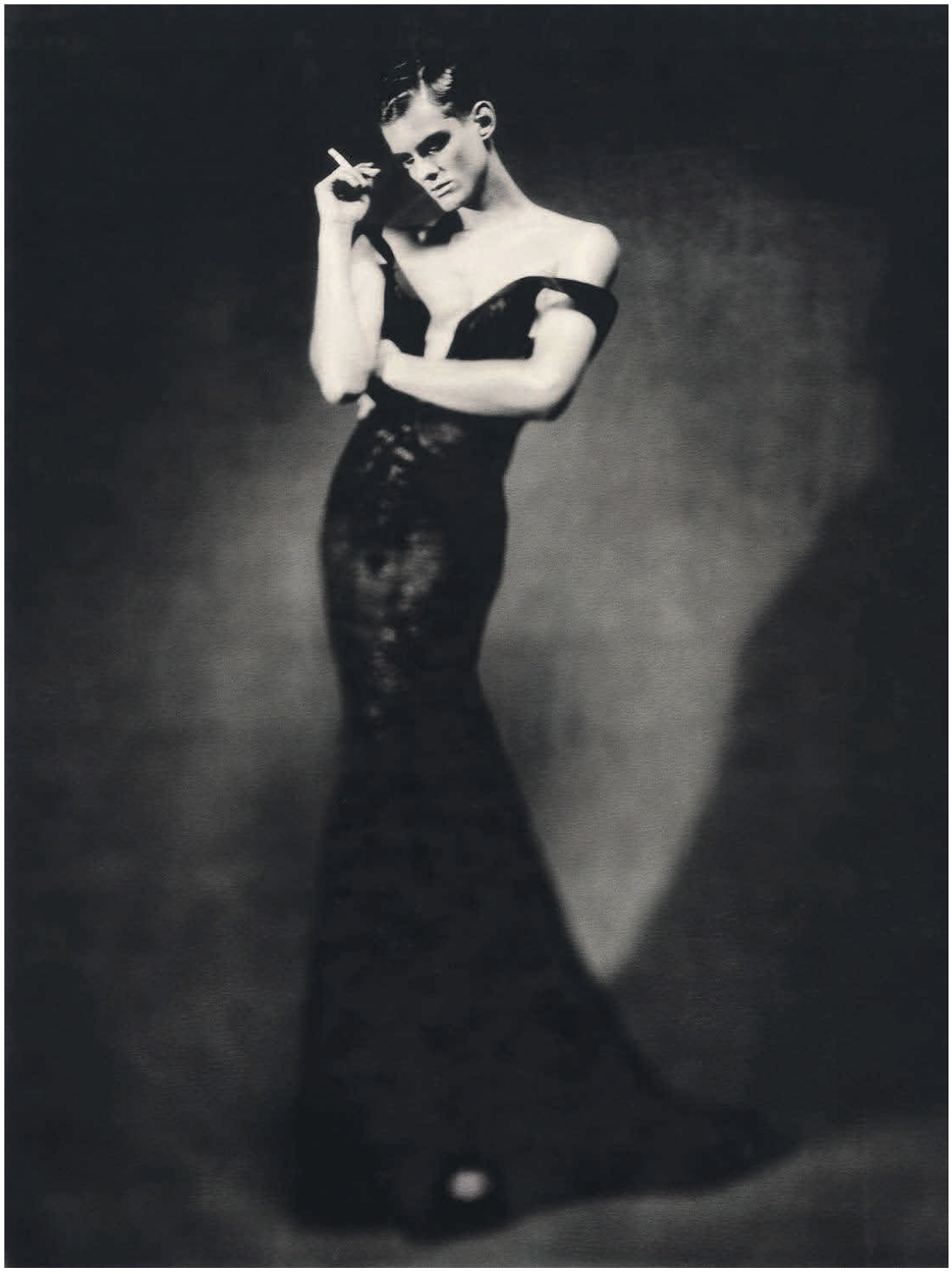
In a narrative verdict, the inquest ruled that Atkinson had "deliberately propelled herself" from the window on the ninth floor, but was unable to decide if she had done so with the intention of ending her own life.

The coroner Naomi McLoughlin said that while "the deliberate act of removing the safety catches from the window" and "the manner of her falling, captured by the CCTV" was significant, other evidence such as the lack of concerning signs in the weeks prior, and the fact she had made plans beyond that day with her family, meant she could not conclusively say Atkinson meant to die when she fell.

The court heard that at the time of her death Atkinson had been suffering from poor mental health and had been worried about the possibility of being incarcerated after failing to attend a court date for a shoplifting offence.

Her father, David Atkinson, told the inquest via a summarised statement that his daughter had come to visit him at his flat that morning. While there, she began to smoke a cigarette in front of a window in his living room, which she then opened fully after removing the safety catches.

Atkinson said that he had asked his daughter what she was doing, to which she had told him "not to worry [as] she was just getting some fresh air", before she said: "I'm off" and fell through the window head first.



Magic from the shadows
A new exhibition in A Coruña is showcasing the photography of Paolo Roversi. The exhibition will show the fashion photographer's iconic masterworks as well as never-before-seen pieces.

◀ *Paolo Roversi's work has won universal acclaim. The collection is considered both an intimate journey through his artistic universe and a celebration of his enduring influence on the language of fashion photography, in a career spanning more than four decades. He chose to name the exhibition Doubts, because for him, doubt is 'the open door to creativity and imagination'*

PHOTOGRAPHS: PAOLO ROVERSI

World

Trump's Board of Peace issues first Gaza contract – for a military base

Aram Roston
Washington

Donald Trump's Board of Peace, which was set up in January to oversee the reconstruction of Gaza, has finally issued its first construction contract in the devastated territory: a project to build a rudimentary 150-person military outpost to house Moroccan troops, a source familiar with the matter told the Guardian.

The contract, which has not yet been finalised, was awarded to Arkel International, a Louisiana-based firm that has previously carried out work with the US government in countries such as Iraq.

The Board of Peace is chaired by the US president and led by a team that includes his son-in-law Jared Kushner and friend Steve Witkoff.

In an email, a Board of Peace official said the board and a group of Palestinian technocrats installed to oversee Gaza "are in the final stages of preparing several contract awards. None have been finalised." The Palestinian group is known as the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza.

The official said: "One prospective contract concerns facilities to support the international stabilisation force [ISF], which will assist in implementing the roadmap's security and governance arrangements."

▲ *Israeli security forces arresting a Palestinian man in a refugee camp*

They added: "This contract will be one of many that are essential for the future of Gaza."

The award comes just days after Trump announced that Hamas had agreed to disarm, though there are considerable questions about how the group would give up its guns. Israel has opposed the plan, and it increased airstrikes in Gaza after Trump's announcement.

The Guardian reported in July that the board's original Gaza reconstruction had shrunk dramatically from an ambitious blueprint to rebuild the whole territory to a small pilot project in the south of the strip.

The base now being planned is just 100 metres by 120 metres and is intended to house a contingent of Moroccan troops, who would rotate from a base in Israel, the source said. It would lie in the 60% of Gaza's territory that the Israeli army directly controls. Israeli forces have also created a buffer zone beyond that area.

The source said the base was about a mile from the Israeli border and would have a "quick extraction route" in case the small force came under attack.

The UN resolution authorising the Board of Peace had approved establishing the ISF for Gaza, and there have been varying reports on which country would provide these troops. Morocco has promised a small contingent, but the legal framework for the ISF has yet to be finalised, and it is not clear when the deployment would begin.

In earlier contract plans seen by the Guardian, the 150-person base was the first phase of a plan to build a 5,000-person military base in Gaza for the ISF.

This base would have included "vehicle fighting positions" and a perimeter berm – or raised defensive bank – and would have rudimentary facilities suitable for short-term deployments. The earlier contract said the first phase would consist of "tents and cots for forces to sleep, as well as chemical toilets and handwashing stations. At this phase, this is what we would consider habitable."

Trump announced in February 2025 that the US would "take over" and "own" Gaza, although the agreement that set up the Board of Peace fell short of that.

At the board's first meeting in January, Kushner unveiled a "master plan" to build "New Gaza" with an expansive waterfront city with gleaming mixed-use towers. "It could be a hope, it could be a destination. A lot of industry," he said.

At least 80% of Gaza's buildings were damaged or destroyed in the war. Ten months after the ceasefire, most of the territory's 2 million people are still living in makeshift and unsanitary camps.

Israeli airstrike 'war crime' Journalists were deliberately targeted, say rights groups

William Christou

An Israeli strike that killed the Lebanese journalist Amal Khalil and injured her colleague Zeinab Faraj in April was a war crime, three rights organisations said yesterday.

Investigations from Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International and Legal Agenda showed that Israel deliberately and directly attacked Khalil and Faraj, with apparent knowledge that they were civilians.

The organisations called for the attacks to be investigated as war crimes, while HRW called for states to halt arms sales to Israel and put targeted sanctions on Israeli officials responsible for ongoing crimes.

Deliberate attacks on civilians, which both journalists were, is a war crime. Israel has killed at least 15 journalists in Lebanon and 210 in Gaza since 2023, according to the UN human rights office.

The reports also indicated that Israel delayed Lebanese ambulances from reaching Khalil and Faraj for hours – at one point dropping stun grenades on Lebanese Red Cross workers and firing on their ambulances.

The delay in rescue might have led to Khalil's death, as hospital reports indicate that she might have still been alive hours after an Israeli strike toppled a building on top of her and Faraj.

"The evidence is clear that the Israeli military knew, or should have, that Faraj and Khalil were civilians, but attacked them anyway, and then prevented paramedics from rescuing them for hours," said Ramzi Kaiss, Lebanon researcher at Human Rights Watch.

Israel said it "regrets any harm caused to journalists," and that the journalists were killed "as part of a series of events" during which two Hezbollah military operatives were killed.

There were about two hours between the initial strike that killed the two men Israel said were Hezbollah operatives, and a second strike that targeted a building the journalists were sheltering in.

Khalil was a 42-year-old journalist working for al-Akhbar, a Lebanese newspaper, while Faraj was a 21-year-old freelance camerawoman and photojournalist. Both had been active in covering the war in Lebanon over the last three years.

On 22 April 2026, the pair drove to the village of al-Tiri, south Lebanon, to verify reports that Israeli troops had left the area. They drove behind a car carrying Ali Nabil Bazzi, a municipal official of the city of Bint Jbeil, as well as Mohammed Hourani, a friend of the local mayor.

Al-Tiri was in what Israel calls its "security zone" in southern Lebanon, which its troops occupy. Amnesty said that despite the Israeli military

'We'll attack wherever'
Inside Colombia's guerrilla camp
Page 26

The claw is my master
Hong Kong's grabber machine addiction
Page 29

Standing firm
A Palestinian girl carries a blackened cuddly toy out of her damaged home in Masafer Yatta in the occupied West Bank after an attack blamed on Israeli settlers.

PHOTOGRAPH: MUSSA QAWASMA/ REUTERS

West Bank
Settler is charged over killing of Palestinian

Reuters

Israeli prosecutors have charged a Jewish settler over the killing of a Palestinian community leader in the occupied West Bank last year – the first such indictment in nearly three years.

In papers filed by the state attorney's office, Yinon Levi is charged with reckless manslaughter in the death of Awdah Hathaleen, a prominent activist who was involved in the 2025 Oscar-winning documentary No Other Land.

The film, made between 2019 and 2023, focuses on the forced displacement of Palestinians from their homes in Masafer Yatta, an area of the occupied West Bank targeted by Israeli forces.

The charges against Levi also include armed trespass and malicious damage to property during an incident in July 2025 in which settlers operated a large excavator in the Palestinian village of Umm al-Khair, prompting a confrontation with residents.

Hathaleen filmed the moment he was shot during the confrontation. Footage released by the Israeli rights group B'Tselem shows Levi drawing a weapon and firing in Hathaleen's direction. Hathaleen is then heard moaning as he falls to the ground.

Levi, who has been placed under sanctions by the UK and EU over violence against Palestinians, has previously denied firing the shot that killed Hathaleen. Reuters was not able to reach his lawyer for comment.

▲ *A woman holds a photo of Awdah Hathaleen during a Tel Aviv protest*

Yesterday's indictment is the first since the Hamas attacks on 7 October 2023, which triggered Israel's war in Gaza and were followed by a rise in settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank, B'Tselem said.

Israeli soldiers and settlers have since killed at least 1,100 Palestinians in the West Bank, among them at least 240 children, according to UN data.

B'Tselem said: "The decision to indict Yinon Levi is the exception that proves the rule. The impunity Israel grants to soldiers and settlers who harm Palestinians is not a failure of the system. It is a central component of a policy designed to allow the violence to continue and escalate."

Israel's military says it investigates instances of wrongdoing by its soldiers, and takes steps to crack down on settler violence.

Hundreds of thousands of Israelis have settled among millions of Palestinians on land captured by Israel in the 1967 war, and sought by Palestinians as the core of a future independent state.

UN bodies, Palestinians and most countries view the settlements as illegal under international law and a major obstacle to peace. Israel disputes that view.

Eighteen Palestinians have been killed in incidents linked to settler attacks so far this year, compared with 17 in the whole of 2025, according to UN figures.

calling it a military zone and barring people from going there, it is still required to distinguish between civilians and combatants.

At 2.25pm, after entering al-Tiri, the car carrying Bazzi and Hournai was struck, killing the men. Khalil called the Lebanese civil defence and requested assistance.

▲ *Amal Khalil, working for the daily al-Akhbar newspaper, reports near a destroyed bridge in Qasmiyeh, Lebanon, on 22 March.*

Mourners, left, carry Khalil's coffin in Baisariyeh, south Lebanon, on 23 April

PHOTOGRAPH: MAHMOUD ZAYYAT/ AFP/GETTY IMAGES

The civil defence drove to the entry of the village, where they were told to stop at a military checkpoint while they waited for authorisation from the Israeli military to enter the village safely.

Rescue crews operating in areas of south Lebanon where fighting is taking place or which the Israeli military occupies must coordinate with the "mechanism", a deconfliction channel, to get safe passage. Among others, the Israeli military must give approval for requests for civil defence to get safe passage.

By 5pm, the UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon had given a safe route for civil defence to follow to enter the town, but Israel had not yet given its approval.

While waiting for the civil defence to arrive, Faraj and Khalil left their car and sought shelter elsewhere. Israeli quadcopters circled overhead while the two journalists waited, Faraj said.

"The drones came extremely close through the roof, less than a metre from my face and Amal's," she said.

At 3.31pm, a member of the Lebanese civil defence called Khalil and urged her to get into her car and drive out of the village, as he had not yet received permission from the mechanism to enter the village.

Around nine minutes later, Israel struck the journalists' car, injuring both women.

"Glass and debris flew towards us. My ear felt like it burst. She [Amal Khalil] was bleeding heavily from the nose and head and had shrapnel wounds in her arm and thigh; she couldn't move her leg," Farj said.

The two women crawled into a nearby building for shelter.

They both continued calling people, asking for assistance, but were told they could not be rescued until authorisation was given from the mechanism.

At 4.25pm, Israel conducted a third strike, bombing the building where they were sheltering, collapsing it and burying both women under the rubble.

At 5pm, permission was given to the Lebanese Red Cross to enter the village. They were able to evacuate Faraj, who had a fractured skull, severe injuries to her right leg and eye, and a crushed hand. Rescuers could not rescue Khalil, who was trapped under rubble.

The rescuers came under attack by an Israeli quadcopter, which dropped a stun grenade near them. Witnesses also said they heard bursts of gunfire during the evacuations, and HRW reviewed photographs of bullet holes in the ambulances consistent with small arms fire.

The rescuers were forced to withdraw with only Faraj.

The Israeli military finally granted the request for rescue crews to re-enter the town at 8.15pm. Khalil's body was recovered at 11pm.

An examination of her body at the nearby Tebnine hospital showed that she probably died at 7pm – two-and-a-half hours after she was struck for the last time.

She was trapped under the rubble during that time, waiting to be rescued, while the Israeli military prevented rescue crews from saving her life.

All three organisations have demanded accountability for Khalil's killing, and described it as part of a larger pattern of impunity by the Israeli military towards civilians.

"The impunity enjoyed by Israeli forces for the killing of journalists and other civilians in Lebanon over the past three years has enabled the Israeli military to continue with its unlawful airstrikes, including direct attacks on civilians," said Heba Morayef, director for the Middle East and north Africa at Amnesty International.

"It is well past time that the international community impose a comprehensive arms embargo on Israel," Morayef added.

Colombia on the brink

Guerrilla group gets ready for a return to conflict

Thomas Graham
Chocó

As the boat approached the riverbank, camouflaged figures watched from the tree line.

Behind them, in the jungle undergrowth, a commander of the National Liberation Army (ELN) sat with his rifle on his lap, amid the buzz and whine of insects and the thwacks of machetes on bamboo, while his troops set up camp, hidden from enemy drones.

Colombia's 62-year-old armed conflict is on the brink of a new chapter, with Abelardo de la Espriella, who takes office as president today, vowing an end to peace talks in favour of a new military offensive. But Colombia's last guerrilla group says it is ready, come what may.

"Where we can go on the offensive, we will," said the commander of the group's western war front, who goes by "Yerson".

"And if the ELN leadership says we have to carry out a military offensive at the national level, we will. Attacks in cities, in the countryside – wherever."

Yerson and his troops were deep in the Pacific department of Chocó, in an ELN stronghold accessible only after hours of river travel, where humid heat soaks through the cloud cover.

Occasional communities, each a line of wooden shacks on stilts, broke the dense forest on the banks. Giant mining barges were moored on the river, with diggers clawing up the riverbed to extract particles of gold.

The ELN and rival armed groups fight to control the San Juan River, its resources and its population. At one point in the journey, armed men from Clan del Golfo, a paramilitary group, stopped the Guardian's boat to question the passengers, before promising to "liberate" the area from the ELN.

But Yerson was unfazed by this threat. "All of the ELN territories are being invaded by bands of mercenaries," he said. "They are very violent – but they are not disputing political power."

▲ *ELN troops are issued with instructions at their jungle encampment in southern Chocó, Colombia. The 60-strong force has equal numbers of men and women*

▼ *The guerrilla group is well supplied with weapons, including modern AK-47 and AR-15 assault rifles, some made in the US*

Colombia's conflict began in the 1960s, rooted in extreme land inequality and exclusionary politics. Leftwing guerrillas emerged to challenge the state, battling government forces that later allied with rightwing paramilitaries, forerunners of the Clan del Golfo. Money from cocaine trafficking fuelled all sides. The conflict has killed hundreds of thousands and displaced millions.

Along with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Farc), the ELN was the most important of the guerrilla groups. Founded in 1964, it fused Marxism-Leninism with Che Guevara's *foco* theory – the idea that a small armed band in a remote rural area can eventually topple the state – and Liberation theology, which framed the struggle against poverty and oppression as an expression of Christian faith.

In their pursuit of revolution, the two groups have carried out killings and kidnappings and forced the confinement and displacement of civilian populations.

But while the Farc finally demobilised in 2016 after striking a peace deal with the Colombian state, the ELN says its members will lay down arms only after the political and economic system has been transformed. "The Farc

Commander 'Yerson' of the ELN's western war front. He says his recruits are drawn from the poor of Colombia, who have few other options

ELN troop members training in jungle warfare. Their commander says they are prepared to mount attacks 'in cities, in the countryside – wherever'

Photographs: Santiago Mesa/ The Guardian

surrendered in exchange for nothing," said Yerson, adding that subsequent presidents have failed to fully implement the peace deal.

In 2022, Gustavo Petro, a leftist who in the 1980s was a guerrilla with the defunct M-19, was elected president on the promise of "Total Peace", vowing to make good on the Farc deal and negotiate with the remaining armed groups – on the left and right.

But after a few years, almost all the talks – including those with the ELN, the Clan del Golfo and Farc dissidents who refused to demobilise in 2016 – either stalled or collapsed.

Yerson rejected the idea that the election of Colombia's first leftist president meant the ELN's goals could be achieved through politics.

"They handed out lands [to the poor]. They did a kind of pension reform. They were looking for ways to improve healthcare," he said.

"But in the end these are small things. They don't help with the popular awakening."

By Yerson's telling, Petro was allowed to take power by the "Colombian oligarchy", which needed to pacify the people after an explosion of inequality protests in 2019 and 2021 but knew he "was never going to do fundamental reforms, that he could be controlled".

"Colombia's political system is not the democracy it claims to be," he said. "That is where the trap is."

The ELN faces a very different proposition in the form of De la Espriella, a Trump-admiring millionaire who rose to prominence as a criminal lawyer representing accused leaders of the AUC, a rightwing paramilitary group that fought the guerrillas and killed civilians accused of helping them.

De la Espriella has given Colombia's armed groups a month to submit to him or face the consequences, while promising to deepen security cooperation with the US and build megaprisons.

However, security analysts say that armed groups have gathered strength and resources. The ELN has about 6,300 members, armed and unarmed, across Colombia and Venezuela.

The 60 or so in the camp were evenly split between men and women, Indigenous and Afro-Colombian. "The majority of the ELN has always been the poor, the lowest down," said Yerson. "Here, as Chocó is more Afro-Indigenous, that's what we are."

> ***'We've been in the struggle for 62 years and there will be many more'***
>
> **'Yerson'**
> *ELN commander*

Each of his troops had a modern assault rifle: either an AK-47 or an AR-15 – some with "Made in USA" stamped on the body. One also had a .50 calibre rifle, bullets from which can punch through vehicles.

The camp was deep in ELN territory and they were relaxed. When someone took out a portable speaker and began to play *vallenatos* – Colombian folk songs – they left their rifles resting against trees or slung them over their backs, and paired up to dance, suddenly looking like the young Colombians they were.

Various groups, including the UN and Human Rights Watch, have accused the ELN of recruiting minors – but Yerson insisted that under-16s could not join up.

He described the ELN as "a life choice" for Colombia's poor, who have few options. "Maybe that's why they join – but once they are here they come to understand why we are fighting," he said.

The ELN functions by taxing "every commercial entity" in its territory and in Chocó this means illegal gold mining and logging. It also carries out ransom kidnappings.

"We are an embryonic state, and every state takes taxes," he said. "If they can strangle us economically, we will cease to exist as a rebel organisation."

Yerson claimed that coca cultivation has "disappeared" in ELN territory in Chocó. He denied that the ELN was involved in drug trafficking but acknowledged it taxed the business like any other.

The US, which has given its military a new role to take on "narcoterrorism" across the Americas, might not think much of that distinction.

"The question of guilt doesn't matter to the US: what matters to them are interests," said Yerson.

"We are the only guerrilla group with political principles left standing in Colombia and the world. We will always be something they want to destroy."

Last week, a car bomb attributed to the ELN exploded outside a police station near the border with Venezuela, injuring 12 police officers and 3 civilians, while drone attacks have become common.

"They have to be legitimate objectives: we don't put car bombs where the civil population will die," said Yerson.

Despite the election of De la Espriella and other rightwing leaders across the continent, Yerson said the ELN was not losing the ideological battle.

"Voters are being deceived," he said, before quoting the revolutionary leader Simón Bolívar: "An ignorant people is the blind instrument of its own destruction."

Asked whether Colombia was any closer to the ELN's goals after decades of conflict, Yerson was unsure: "I don't know. But I can tell you that the only way to win things for the people is through the struggle," he said. "We've been in the struggle for 62 years and there will be many more."

Danish pupils face oral tests on essays to stop AI cheats

Miranda Bryant
Nordic correspondent

Teenagers in Denmark will have to make an oral defence of their written essays to combat AI cheating, the government has announced.

Pupils aged 16 to 19 at upper secondary school (known in Denmark as *gymnasiet*) will also be encouraged to do written assignments at school under controlled conditions, including monitoring of their computer screens, rather than at home.

The measures, announced yesterday as pupils prepare to go back to school next week after the summer break, will come into immediate effect after Magnus Heunicke, the country's education minister, demanded urgent action.

"Unfortunately, we have a problem with AI cheating in upper secondary schools," he said. "Action is needed now."

AI posed a growing challenge to teaching and exams, the education ministry said. It is hoped the new measures will help to establish clearer guidelines for when pupils are not permitted to use it.

The government is also preparing a comprehensive national strategy for AI use in all schools and the wider education sector.

Heunicke said he would speak to schools, teachers and students to "ensure that AI does not undermine students' competencies, professionalism and, not least, the ability to think for themselves".

The first measure to be introduced is the oral defence of exam assignments written at home. About 9,000 upper secondary school students each year write a big assignment (known as *større skriftlige opgave* or SSO), which they will now have to defend orally. The ministry said it would speak to schools about the best way to do this.

Upper secondary schools will also be required to use monitoring tools to oversee how computers are being used for written exams. They are required to install firewalls to filter what is available on the school network during exams and teaching.

The third measure is a plea to schools to encourage pupils to do more of their written assignments at school under controlled conditions, to "follow the students' work process, provide relevant feedback and create a more accurate basis for assessment".

In Sweden, a study has found that the number of students suspended or warned for unauthorised AI use rose by 688% between 2023 and 2025.

Announcing a policy review, Lotta Edholm, a Swedish education minister, said in January: "There is no reason to turn a blind eye to cheating students. Cheating is completely unacceptable regardless of what form.

"It risks affecting grades that should reflect students' knowledge and in the long term students are not actually learning what they should."

688%
Rise in number of students in Sweden caught using unauthorised AI from 2023 to 2025

Officials fear Ebola virus in DRC may be mutating

Kat Lay
Global health correspondent

The virus causing a massive outbreak of Ebola in the Democratic Republic of the Congo could be mutating, health officials fear, as confirmed cases pass 4,000.

Africa's public health watchdog said the time for incremental action was over, as it announced plans to scale up every aspect of the response and go "door to door" looking for patients.

The Ebola outbreak, caused by the Bundibugyo strain of the virus, was first reported on 15 May, although the disease could have been spreading since January.

There have been 3,973 cases and 1,801 deaths recorded as of 4 August, according to the DRC's national public health institute.

Speaking yesterday, Dr Jean Kaseya, director general of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), told a press briefing that cases had exceeded 4,000.

The outbreak is now the second-largest Ebola epidemic on record. There are eight times more cases, and six times more deaths than were recorded 11 weeks into the West Africa Ebola outbreak in 2014-18, which infected more than 28,000 people and killed more than 11,000.

Kaseya said he had spoken to the WHO chief, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, and they planned studies "to check if there is any additional issue, or changes to the virus, because the level of severity of this Bundibugyo outbreak is unprecedented."

More than two-thirds of Ebola deaths are happening in the community, rather than in treatment centres. In an MSF-run centre in Bunia, 90% of admitted patients did not appear on authorities' lists of contacts of known cases, indicating high levels of untracked transmission.

Kaseya said contact tracing in the DRC was insufficient, with only 10 contacts out of an expected 40 identified for every Ebola patient.

Ebola is a viral haemorrhagic fever that can cause vomiting, diarrhoea, organ damage and internal bleeding. The outbreak has centred in Ituri province, but now spread to Nord-Kivu, Sud-Kivu, Haut-Uele and Tshopo. There were also 20 recorded cases in neighbouring Uganda.

Nigerian president hails rescue of 300 hostages abducted by militants

Eromo Egbejule
Abidjan

Nigerian security forces have rescued more than 300 abducted people in what the president, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, hailed as the largest single-day hostage recovery in the country's history.

The release was announced on Wednesday after a joint operation by the military, police and counter-terrorism units freed victims held captive in the dense forests of the Kainji Lake national park in the north-central region.

Among those who regained freedom were 163 people abducted in February during a deadly raid on the village of Woro in Kwara state, and 145 others seized primarily from the neighbouring Niger state.

Both states are flanked to the west by Benin, where militant attacks have been surging in recent times. Officials confirmed the survivors were receiving medical attention at an army installation before being reunited with their families.

"The successful execution of this intelligence-led operation demonstrates the growing efficiency and collaboration among our security services," Tinubu said. "I commend our gallant men and women in uniform for their bravery and unwavering commitment to safeguarding Nigerian lives."

The government spokesperson Bayo Onanuga said the rescue operation was part of the president's resolve to "restore lasting peace across every corner of the nation".

In the last decade, kidnapping for ransom has become endemic in Africa's most populous country, especially in the north where different armed groups including bandit gangs and jihadists roam large swathes of unoccupied forests and shrublands.

Between July 2024 and June 2025, at least 4,722 people were kidnapped across 997 reported incidents, leading to at least 762 deaths, according to a report by the Lagos-based geopolitical advisory SBM Intelligence. In that 12-month period, abductors demanded 48bn naira (£26m) in payments, with families and communities ultimately handing over at least 2.57bn naira in ransom to secure the release of their loved ones.

Before January's presidential election, in which Tinubu is seeking a second four-year term, the government has been ramping up reforms and rescue operations as insecurity worsens.

The latest rescue was announced in the same week the army declared the governor of Islamic State West Africa Province, Abu Musa al-Mangawi Baa Shuwa, and his deputy, Amirul Jaish Muhammad Jidda, wanted men. The duo run the Islamic State-affiliated Boko Haram offshoot operating primarily around the Lake Chad basin, which straddles Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria.

In July, security services freed at least 40 students and teachers who had been kidnapped in May from a school in Oyo in south-western Nigeria.

Last week, the presidency announced a salary increase worth 30% to 80% for thousands of soldiers, the largest rise in years for an army once seen as one of the continent's most powerful but now derided as underfunded and unequipped.

▲ *The scene of a raid on Woro, Kwara state, in February in which 163 people were abducted. In July, students and teachers taken in Oyo, left, were freed*

PHOTOGRAPHS: LIGHT ORIYE TAMUNOTONYE/AFP/GETTY; EMMANUEL ADEGBOYE/EPA

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Claw machine shops in Hong Kong attract players of all ages, offering plushies, Labubu dolls and Pokémon collectibles as prizes, right

PHOTOGRAPH: BILLY HC KWOK/ THE GUARDIAN; ILLUSTRATION: GETTY IMAGES

Claws out

Addiction fears as gaming craze grabs hold of Hong Kong

Jessie Pang
Hong Kong

In Hong Kong's neon-lit arcades, a maze of claw machines illuminates the prizes of the day: plushie toys, Labubu dolls and an array of Pokémon collectibles.

Across the city, claw machine shops have proliferated, now numbering more than 2,500, many filling vacant spaces left by businesses that closed in the pandemic. The venues, some of them open 24 hours a day, attract players of all ages.

"Visiting a claw machine shop is like escaping," said Hiu-ching, a 28-year-old radiographer who became so enthralled with the game that she decided to rent a machine and operate her own stall.

"I can't resist playing the claw machine all the time. Because I lack skill, I usually play the claw machine with a lucky draw, which is similar to rolling dice."

Some players are happy with any prize, while others are enticed by the possible resale value of some of the rare collectibles on offer.

Every month, Jerry and Parco meet to play claw machines together, something they have been doing since last year. Parco said he once spent more than HK$4,000 (£380) playing claw machines floor by floor at the Dragon Centre, a small arcade in Hong Kong's Sham Shui Po district.

To most, claw machines are a bit of fun but there are concerns about people spending too much time on them. In May, the home and youth affairs bureau proposed stricter regulations, including displaying addiction risk warnings.

A 2022 court ruling exempted claw machines from public entertainment licences, leaving them unregulated.

Some serious claw machine players have gripes with operators, claiming they use bamboo toothpicks and needles, as well as plastic and metal strips, to narrow the hole and slow down the machine's crane, making it harder for people to win.

"As someone who loves to play claw machines, I am quite unhappy about the current trend, as there are many ways to narrow or seal the hole," said Parco.

Hong Kong's consumer council has said complaints about claw machines surged from 16 in 2023 to 138 last year, with players alleging operators altered settings to lower the odds of winning.

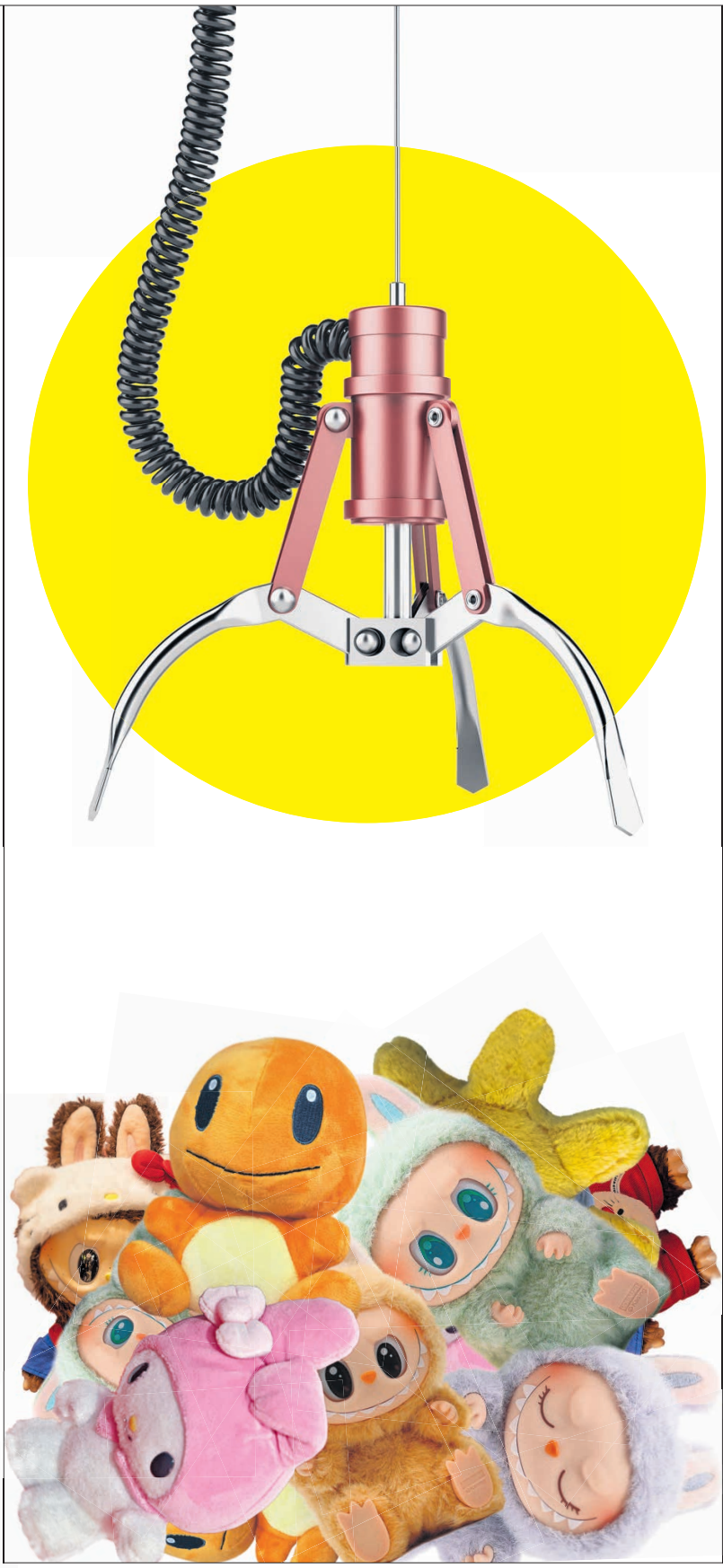
But for many Hongkongers, claw machines are a cheap way to relieve stress. Ming Lee, a 38-year-old school cleaner, plays claw machines to relax. She has collected about 100 plushie toys from playing the machines over the past two years. "It's the thrill of successfully grabbing a prize that attracts me," she said.

Ki Kwong, a 25-year-old kitchen worker and a claw machine owner, said playing the machines was "a joy". A message placed on one of his machines filled with plushies reads: "Remember to be happy."

He also gives away the plushies he wins to his customers, if they do not win themselves.

"After playing claw machines for so long, I want to share with others … I want to let people experience that playing the claw machine is not a pressure but a joy."

Kwong sees claw machines as a way to connect with young people: "The current youth suicide rate in Hong Kong is high," he says. "They are under a lot of pressure, and this is a stress-relieving activity, so I believe I can do more."



'[Young people] are under a lot of pressure, and this is a stress-relieving activity'

Ki Kwong
Claw machine owner

Indian court sentences journalist to 10 years for rape of colleague

Agence France-Presse
Mumbai

A court yesterday jailed the former editor of a news magazine for raping a junior colleague, overturning his acquittal in a case that gripped India.

Tarun Tejpal, 63, committed the sexual assault in the lift of a five-star hotel in the western coastal state of Goa during an event in November 2013. He was arrested and spent seven months in jail until the supreme court granted him bail.

In 2021, a court in Goa acquitted Tejpal of a series of charges that included rape, sexual harassment and wrongful restraint.

But the government of Goa challenged the acquittal at the high court in Mumbai, which yesterday set aside the lower court's verdict.

"He has been convicted to 10 years of rigorous imprisonment. He has been given two weeks to surrender," said Sunita Sawant, the police investigator who led the case.

The high court also ordered Tejpal, who founded the investigative magazine Tehelka in 2000, to pay a £3,900 penalty.

Tejpal said he would challenge the conviction in the supreme court.

He had initially blamed the assault on "a lapse of judgment" but later alleged the case against him was part of a vendetta by the Bharatiya Janata party (BJP) government in Goa.

"For the past 13 years, they have been pursuing me as a part of a political vendetta," he claimed. But Sawant told reporters: "This is a sentence where a girl has stood up for her rights … so this judgment is very important for women who are working in any sector."

The case emerged at a time when sexual assault cases were under intense scrutiny after the gang-rape and murder of a student on a Delhi bus in December 2012.

That attack triggered nationwide protests and international outrage, and prompted the government to strengthen the country's rape laws.

Tejpal's case severely damaged the authority and credibility of Tehelka, which has championed women's rights and social justice.

The news magazine is operating under new leadership but has failed to regain the influence it enjoyed before the 2013 rape case.

Rape Crisis offers support on 0808 500 2222 in England and Wales, 0808 801 0302 in Scotland, or 0800 0246 991 in Northern Ireland

Korean police raid Starbucks in row over ads

Associated Press
Seoul

South Korean police have raided the headquarters of Starbucks Korea as part of an investigation into a marketing campaign that has been accused of trivialising the country's 1980s pro-democracy movement.

Investigators searched the building in southern Seoul on Tuesday, police said on Wednesday.

No further details were released, although local media reported that police officers had also searched the homes of the Starbucks Korea executives. The coffee chain caused a public outcry after launching a range of stainless steel reusable tumblers it called "SS Tank" and declared 18 May "Tank Day". The date is the anniversary of the 1980 Gwangju uprising, when demonstrators were brutally suppressed by South Korea's then military-backed government.

The campaign slogan "Thwack it on the table!" was viewed by some as a reference to a 1987 police claim that the student activist Park Jong-chul died when an investigator simply "hit the desk with a thwack", concealing that died during interrogation.

The outrage against Starbucks prompted Shinsegae Group, which owns a 67.5% stake in Starbucks Korea, to cancel the promotion and dismiss the firm's chief executive.

South Korea's transition to democracy gained momentum in 1987, when the authoritarian president Chun Doo-hwan, whose government had overseen the Gwangju crackdown, accepted constitutional reforms introducing direct presidential elections after months of protests.

The Guardian Live

Naomi Klein and Astra Taylor: How to resist end times fascism

The governing ideology of the far right has become a monstrous, supremacist survivalism. How do we build a movement strong enough to stop them?

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Business

Diageo will double Guinness production but cut workforce

Rob Davies

Diageo's new chief executive has unveiled plans to nearly double Guinness production while cutting a "significant" proportion of its 30,000-strong workforce, in a strategic overhaul worthy of his nickname, "Drastic" Dave Lewis.

Shares in Diageo bounced yesterday as the former Tesco boss faced down the first big test of his time in the job, after being parachuted in last November to revive the flagging fortunes of the UK-based drinks firm.

Speaking after the company announced a decline in sales but slightly better-than-expected operating profit, Lewis said his turnaround plan would involve job cuts, adding that the "consequences of that are not great for anybody".

But he added: "Nobody [inside the company] is saying to me that this is the wrong thing to do."

Lewis declined to give a figure for the expected reduction in the company's worldwide headcount. However, Diageo has told investors it expects to incur $514m (£382m) in charges relating to employee severance, and Lewis said he had discovered "massive" duplication in roles since becoming chief executive.

Lewis, who earned the "Drastic Dave" nickname in the City for his cost-cutting zeal, promised to deliver $1bn of annual savings over two years through a restructuring that would cost $1.2bn and was aimed at making the company more agile.

While this will involve slashing jobs, Lewis vowed to harness the seemingly unstoppable popularity of Guinness around the world.

A $1bn investment in the brand is aimed at increasing global sales, particularly in North America, and helping the company avoid a repeat of shortages reported in the UK in recent years, including during the important festive period.

"We're going to double the capacity of Guinness during the course of this plan [by 2031]," Lewis said, adding that the future of the brand was "very bright".

Production capacity is slated to increase from 8.2m hectolitres today to 15.7m by 2031, an increase equivalent to 300 Olympic-sized swimming pools a year.

In the months after his appointment, some City pundits speculated that he might take the radical step of selling Guinness to raise up to £8bn. The company moved quickly to quash any suggestion it would sell its best-performing big brand.

Diageo was not actively seeking to sell its poorer-performing brands, Lewis said.

300

The number of Olympic-sized pools that could be filled with the extra Guinness to be produced each year

Over the past decade, the company has focused on "premiumisation", banking on discerning drinkers choosing upmarket brands. That strategy has left Diageo with an overloaded stable of expensive labels just as cash-strapped consumers stopped drinking from the top shelf.

Lewis said Diageo would not be "hawking our brands" and was not looking to buy assets either, but would focus more on a broader portfolio, including mid-market brands and smaller pack sizes that were likely to suit cost-conscious drinkers.

He also promised to address Diageo's failure to cash in on the so-called ready-to-drink category, such as premade cocktails or "gin in a tin". Lewis added: "We're just going to roll our sleeves up and get on with our own business."

Shares in Diageo rose by more than 6% in afternoon trading, indicating early contentment among investors of the turnaround plan.

The company said yesterday that annual pre-tax profit fell by 26%, from $3.5bn to $2.6bn, after it booked in $900m in restructuring charges and a $1.5bn hit, largely related to its Turkish business.

Without the one-off impact and other charges such as debt interest, operating profit was slightly ahead of analysts' forecasts at $5.7bn.

EasyJet agrees to £5.7bn takeover from US private equity firm

Gwyn Topham
Transport correspondent

EasyJet has formally agreed to a £5.7bn takeover from US private equity firm Apollo Global Management after a rival bidder, Castlelake, said it would no longer pursue its attempted acquisition.

Yesterday's decision means the deal will go through at £7.15 a share, which Apollo tabled last month after easyJet had recommended a sale to Castlelake. The formal agreement came 24 hours before a deadline set for both parties to submit a final offer, but Castlelake declined to enter a bidding war. Under the agreement, the airline's founder, Stelios Haji-Ioannou, and his family will retain their shareholding, currently about 15%, in the new structure.

Shareholders have been offered the opportunity to either sell or transfer, up to a maximum of 49.9%. An "EU Trust" shareholding group will retain up to 5%, a structure that appears designed to comply with the European Union's foreign ownership rules for airlines, with Apollo limited to 49.9%. The takeover is expected to complete by the end of March 2027.

Apollo, which has committed to retaining easyJet's UK and EU head offices, has indicated it would back the airline's current strategy and support it in generating long-term, sustainable growth.

Alex van Hoek, the US firm's European private equity lead, said: "EasyJet is a leader in European aviation, having built a differentiated market position through its compelling customer proposition, expansive network and strong brand. Apollo strongly supports easyJet's commitment to enhancing the connectivity of travellers throughout Europe and the UK and the important role that its employees play."

Stephen Hester, the airline's chair, said: "The easyJet board has carefully evaluated the proposal from Apollo alongside easyJet's standalone prospects ... we believe this offer appropriately recognises the quality of the business we have built and delivers immediate, certain and attractive value for shareholders."

Kenton Jarvis, easyJet's chief executive, said: "We welcome Apollo's commitment to our business and our people, and believe that its experience in the aviation sector makes it a strong partner for easyJet."

EasyJet's share price, which dropped 10% on news of Castlelake's exit, rebounded to 3% up from the start of yesterday.

High streets wilt as summer heatwaves drive shoppers to buy online

Sarah Butler

Shoppers stayed away from UK high streets during last month's heatwave temperatures, with many choosing to buy online instead as the mercury in some areas rose into the mid-30Cs.

Trips to high streets were down by 3.8% year on year in July after a 6.2% fall in June, according to research from the firm Sensormatic for the British Retail Consortium (BRC).

Visitors to shopping centres also declined, but those at retail parks returned to growth, with a 2.1% overall decrease in numbers attending all shopping destinations against the same month last year.

Helen Dickinson, the BRC chief executive, said: "The heatwave continued to bear down on retail footfall in July, with high streets worst affected. London was hit particularly hard as soaring temperatures made tube and train travel less attractive, with some commuters and shoppers opting to stay home."

The capital had 5.3% fewer shoppers last month compared with 3% across England. There were increases of 2.7% in Scotland and 2.5% in Northern Ireland and flat footfall in Wales, where the weather was less intense.

▲ *Shoppers in Liverpool try to keep cool in late June. High street visits fell by 6.2% that month* PHOTOGRAPH: CHRISTOPHER THOMOND/THE GUARDIAN

Dickinson said: "Climate change continues to deliver more and more extreme temperatures in the UK. Retailers are responding by investing in mitigations – such as more air conditioning and more efficient refrigeration units – and in sustainability initiatives aimed at reducing carbon emissions.

"Unfortunately, business rates often punish stores for such investments, showing the need for government to look again at this broken system."

The figures highlight the potentially differing fortunes of retailers during the hot spell, with those more reliant on physical stores suffering.

On Wednesday, the fashion and homewares retailer Next upgraded its profit guidance for the third time this year, saying it had benefited from sunny weather and the release of some "pent-up demand" in the 13 weeks to 1 August.

Fashion is expected to be one of the winners in retail this summer, along with supermarkets and technology sellers as people bought cold food and drink, fans and air-conditioning to cope with the heat.

Furniture and garden plants are among the losers, with the former under pressure from the cost of living and slow housing market while fewer plants have been planted because of the extreme heat and dry weather.

Persimmon increases housebuilding forecast amid 'Burnham bounce'

Kalyeena Makortoff

The UK housebuilder Persimmon has lifted its outlook for the full year, saying it is "well placed" to benefit from the prime minister Andy Burnham's policy agenda, despite growing costs linked to the Iran war.

As confidence rises across the housebuilding sector, Persimmon plans to complete 12,500 new homes by year-end, which would be at the upper reach of its previous guidance.

The housebuilder is now hoping to benefit from Burnham's policy programme, including plans to increase housing and slash costs for cash-strapped consumers.

"Persimmon remains well placed to drive further growth through our unique set of capabilities," the company said. "The UK housing market continues to experience both a long-term undersupply of housing and affordability challenges for new homeowners, which is a key focus for the new government.

"As the most cost-efficient national housebuilder, with a clear focus on customer value and affordability, a growing land pipeline and expanding outlet network, we are well-placed to respond."

The FTSE 100 company told investors that pre-tax profits were up 15% for the first six months of the year to £168m, after a 13% rise in the number of homes built over the same period despite "challenging" market conditions, a rise in building costs, and with many people still struggling to afford homes.

Persimmon added that cost pressures were likely to increase in the coming months. "We expect additional inflationary pressure in 2027 as a result of the conflict in the Middle East," it said in a market update.

However, the housebuilder said that even its own focus on low costs and its efforts to make the business more efficient might not be enough to fully offset inflation. "We have taken additional management actions to secure further cost savings, including identifying procurement savings, specification optimisation, house-type design, overhead savings and operational efficiencies," the company added.

▲ *The company plans to complete 12,500 new homes by the end of the year as confidence rises in the sector*
PHOTOGRAPH: JASON ALDEN/BLOOMBERG/GETTY

'Persimmon remains well placed to drive further growth through our unique set of capabilities'

Persimmon
Market update

Optimism across the UK construction sector rose last month, according to data from S&P Global yesterday.

The data and analytics company found that "hopes of a rebound in domestic economic conditions and signs of an improved near-term outlook for customer demand" had lifted builders' confidence.

However, output across the sector fell again in July, but at the slowest rate in four months, with housebuilding, commercial construction and civil engineering all recording a smaller drop in activity than in June.

"July data suggests that the performance of UK construction sector has started to stabilise after a sharp downturn throughout the second quarter of 2026," said Tim Moore, the economics director of S&P Global Market Intelligence.

"Business activity levels continued to decline in all three main categories, but in each case the rate of contraction was much slower than in June. This was supported by the weakest reduction in new business intakes since September 2025."

Burnham has put Britain's housing crisis at the centre of his domestic agenda, promising to oversee the "biggest council housebuilding programme since the postwar period".

Economists have said geopolitical uncertainty, economic conditions and high borrowing costs are all dampening the housebuilding sector.

Carly Thorpe, a construction and engineering partner at the law firm Walker Morris, said the sector also continued to face structural barriers. "Delays in Building Safety Regulator gateway approvals are slowing project delivery, while persistent skills shortages are placing pressure on capacity, costs and timescales."

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‘I’m not spying’ Are Meta glasses life-changing or a dystopian horror?

▼ *Mark Zuckerberg, the Meta chief executive, with the fashion stylist Tina Leung at a Meta smartglasses launch party in New York this year*

Nicola Slawson
Rosie Peters-McDonald

With more than 7m pairs reportedly sold in 2025, Meta’s Ray-Ban smartglasses are fast becoming one of the world’s most popular gadgets.

While supporters say they are transforming photography and accessibility, critics have raised concerns about nonconsensual filming, privacy and data collection. We spoke to users, and people who refuse to wear them, about the impact they have had.

‘It’s not like I’m spying’

Based in The Hague in the Netherlands, Servaas wears his Meta glasses every day. He bought them for the built-in camera rather than the AI features and uses them to photograph and film walks and bike rides. “It’s an immersive experience,” he says. “I love everything tech.”

He says the discreet camera means most people don’t realise he is wearing smartglasses, although he was once stopped by security at an event held in a government building because staff feared he might be recording. “For some reason, security didn’t understand. They were very scared of [the glasses]. People said I should have expected that but I didn’t agree with them. It’s not like I’m spying.”

Despite claims that Meta workers in Kenya viewed private footage recorded on the glasses, Servaas was not put off. “I know Meta loves your data [but] I’m not worried about my privacy because I’ve only used them to record outside.”

PHOTOGRAPHS: DAVID PAUL MORRIS/BLOOMBERG/GETTY IMAGES; JASON LOWRIE/BFA.COM/SHUTTERSTOCK

‘A real gamechanger’

For others, however, the glasses offer far more than convenience. Nikki, 59, from Devon, has been blind since birth owing to an inherited retinal disease and calls the glasses, received as a Christmas present, “a real gamechanger”.

“I live in quite a rural location,” she says. “I could hear something going on ahead of me as I was walking down to the village shop. I said: ‘Hey Meta, look and tell me what’s in front of me.’ It told me there was a van unloading scaffolding. It’s things like that that I find absolutely amazing.”

While she understands concerns about privacy, Nikki worries public criticism could make the technology less accessible for people who genuinely rely on it.

“I kind of worry that if people start going on about privacy and safety, it will be harder for those of us who genuinely benefit from the glasses,” she says.

‘The caption feature just doesn’t work’

Karen Walter, 84, from San Diego, who has had severe hearing loss for more than 20 years, bought them solely for their live-caption feature.

▲ *A demonstration event for Meta’s Ray-Ban smartglasses, more than 7m of which were sold last year*

> ***‘I saw someone wearing them in a cafe and just moved away because I felt uncomfortable’***
>
> **Kiki**
> *West Midlands*

“Even with state-of-the-art hearing aids, I have a great deal of difficulty understanding what people are saying unless the person is very close to me and speaking directly to me,” she says. “I expected [the glasses] would be a great help in noisy environments and when I was trying to keep up with conversations.”

The live captions worked well during a demonstration in a quiet Best Buy store, she says.

“But I have tried the glasses when in a group of three up to a group of seven and the caption feature just doesn’t work.”

‘They’ve made me much more wary in public’

Not everyone is convinced the technology belongs in everyday life at all. Kiki, from the West Midlands, says seeing people wearing the hi-tech glasses in public has left her feeling uneasy.

“When someone’s just looking at you through their glasses, it worries me,” she says. “I imagine taking images secretly is far easier [than on phones]. You could just pretend to adjust your hair or cap, and press the button in a passing gesture. I’ve seen people wearing them. I saw someone wearing them in a cafe and just moved away because I felt uncomfortable.”

Although she accepts the technology could have genuine benefits, Kiki says her concern is more about the lack of safeguards. “For accessibility, absolutely,” she says. “But what bothers me is regulations often lag so far behind technology.”

“They have made me much more wary in public,” she says. “I can, however, see that people working in a shop late at night by themselves might feel safer being able to take a picture of someone harassing them.”

‘I just don’t trust it’

Pete, 44, from Northampton, believes the glasses point to a broader problem: AI-powered wearables collecting ever more personal data with too little scrutiny or regulation.

“I’m not an old man shaking my fist at the clouds,” he says. “I’ve been onboard with technological advancement all my life, but with AI and Meta glasses, I’m drawing the line.” He is more concerned about where the data ends up than covert filming. “I don’t know who’s getting the pictures at the end and what they’re doing with them.”

Nintendo’s profits surge by 54% after Trump tariff refunds

Kalyeena Makortoff

Nintendo has reported a jump in profits, with its earnings buoyed up by a long-awaited refund on Donald Trump’s “liberation day” tariffs.

The Japanese game maker said profits surged 53.5% to 147.4bn yen (£694m) over the three months to June, substantially beating expert forecasts for 77.8bn yen. Nintendo said sales of its Switch 2 console, which was released last summer, maintained strong momentum while the games Yoshi and the Mysterious Book, Star Fox, and Pokémon Pokopia performed steadily.

▲ *Yoshi and the Mysterious Book was a steady seller on Switch 2*

However, that did not make up for an overall drop in sales compared with the same period last year, with revenue down by 10% to 517.8bn yen.

Nintendo said profits were boosted by a refund on tariffs after the US supreme court ruled in February that President Trump’s sweeping trade levies were illegal.

The US has refunded about $100bn (£74bn) of the tariffs charged before the court ruling – about 60% of the total it had collected.

Trump is continuing to pitch tariffs as a way to revive domestic production, secure better trade deals and close the deficit in the federal budget.

Nintendo’s Tokyo-listed shares were up 2.87% yesterday after the earnings release.

The company filed a lawsuit weeks after the US supreme court ruling, demanding a full refund from the White House that would cover what it spent on tariffs, plus interest.

While a refund now appears to have come through, Nintendo stopped short of confirming the full amount, at a time when it appears to be resisting calls to pass the refunds on to its customers.

Nintendo was hit with a class action lawsuit last month on behalf of customers, which says the company raised its prices because of tariffs but later benefited from the refunds.

Nintendo’s lawyers described the lawsuit as “meritless” because the price customers paid represented “the purchase price of the goods they wanted and received”.

Trump last month imposed fresh tariffs on more than 80 countries, including Japan. However, a coalition of 25 US states is suing the White House over the levies, potentially opening the door to more refunds.

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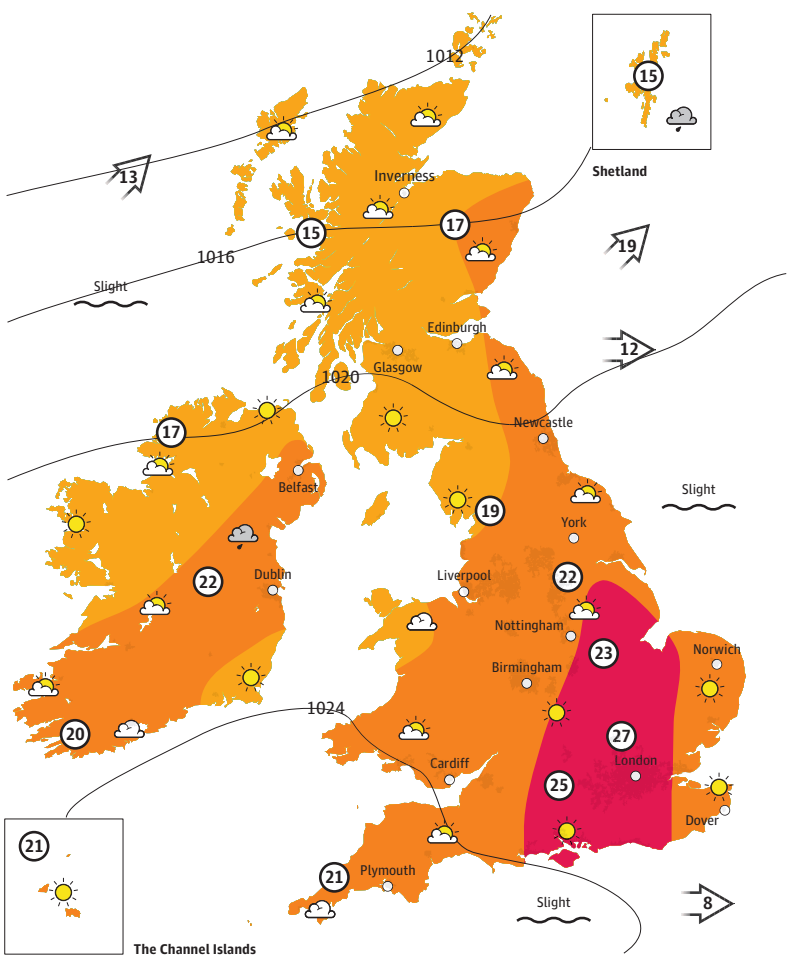
Weather
Friday 7 August 2026

UK and Ireland Noon today

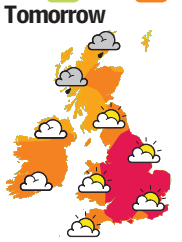
Sunny · Mist · Fog · Sunny intervals · Hazy · Mostly cloudy · Overcast/dull · Sunny showers · Sunny and heavy showers · Light showers · Rain · Sleet · Light snow · Snow showers · Heavy snow · Ice · Thundery rain · Thundery showers · Temperature, ºC · Wind speed, mph · Windy

35C 30 25 20 15 10 5 0 -5 -10 -15 -20

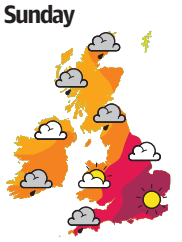


Forecast

Low 9 High 25
Tomorrow



Low 13 High 23
Sunday



Carbon count

Daily atmospheric CO_2 readings from Mauna Loa, Hawaii (ppm):

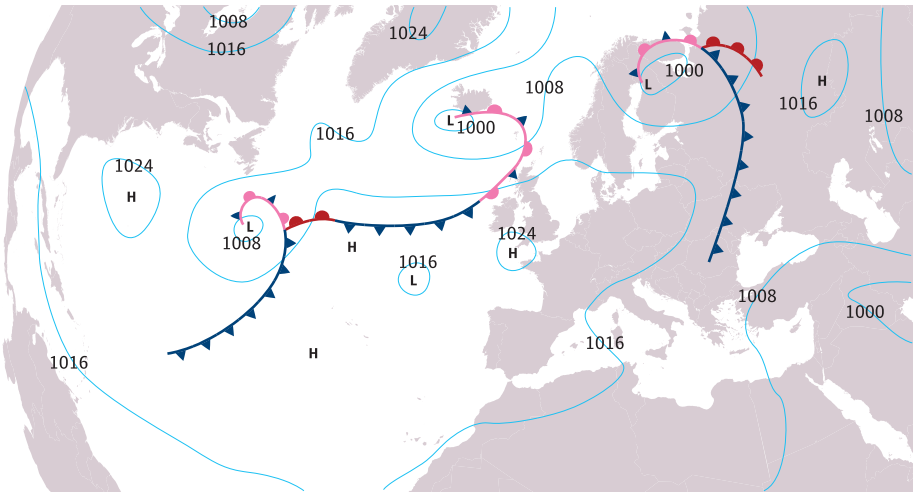
Latest	
02 Aug 2026	428.47
Weekly average	
26 Jul 2026	429.00
06 Aug 2025	426.74
06 Aug 2016	404.17
Pre-industrial base	*280*
Safe level	*350*

Source: NOAA-ESRL

Around the UK

	Lows and highs	Precipitation	Air pollution
London	13 27	0%	Low
Manchester	9 21	25%	Low
Edinburgh	12 18	25%	Low
Belfast	12 20	20%	Low
Glasgow	12 17	25%	Low
Inverness	14 18	85%	Low
Leeds	11 21	5%	Low
Liverpool	9 23	5%	Low
Newcastle	11 20	15%	Low
Sheffield	12 22	5%	Low

Atlantic front



Cold front · Warm front · Occluded front · Trough

High tides

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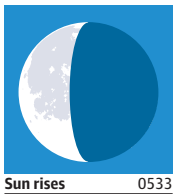
Aberdeen	0712	3.7m	2004	3.5m
Avonmouth	0024	10.8m	1252	10.4m
Barrow	0504	7.8m	1739	7.4m
Belfast	0439	3.1m	1729	3.0m
Cobh	1118	3.5m	2356	3.4m
Cromer	0009	4.1m	1218	4.4m
Dover	0428	5.6m	1707	5.7m
Dublin	0524	3.6m	1809	3.4m
Galway	1120	4.1m	2358	4.0m
Greenock	0540	3.0m	1808	3.0m
Harwich	0530	3.4m	1739	3.4m
Holyhead	0355	4.8m	1641	4.5m
Hull	--	--	1208	6.4m
Leith	0821	4.8m	2113	4.6m
Liverpool	0434	8.1m	1715	7.7m
London Bridge	0718	5.9m	1944	6.2m
Lossiemouth	0521	3.5m	1808	3.3m
Milford Haven	--	--	1203	5.6m
Newquay	1101	5.4m	2345	5.4m
North Shields	0914	4.4m	2207	4.1m
Oban	--	--	1128	3.0m
Penzance	1028	4.5m	2308	4.5m
Plymouth	--	--	1133	4.5m
Portsmouth	0513	4.0m	1753	4.1m
Southport	0347	7.8m	1621	7.4m
Stornoway	0041	3.9m	1337	3.7m
Portland	--	--	1223	1.4m
Whitby	0945	4.8m	2239	4.5m
Wick	0455	3.0m	1746	2.8m
Workington	0503	7.0m	1743	6.7m

Sun & Moon



Sun rises	0533
Sun sets	2038
Moon rises	2344
Moon sets	1638
New Moon	12 Aug

AccuWeather.com

Forecasts and graphics provided by **AccuWeather** ©2026

Lighting up

Belfast	2114 to 0548
Birm'ham	2048 to 0538
Brighton	2036 to 0537
Bristol	2048 to 0546
Carlisle	2102 to 0533
Cork	2113 to 0607
Dublin	2110 to 0553
Glasgow	2112 to 0536
Harlech	2059 to 0546
Inverness	2118 to 0527
London	2038 to 0534
M'chester	2054 to 0537
Newcastle	2058 to 0528
Norwich	2037 to 0525
Penzance	2055 to 0601

Pollutionwatch

Researchers at the University of Edinburgh and the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology have been tracking wildfire smoke arriving in the UK. They found that wildfires, some on the other side of the globe, are responsible for about 10% of the country's particle pollution.

Damaris Tan from the University of Edinburgh said: "While wildfires may not impact air pollution in the UK as acutely as other countries, wildfires globally add to the UK population's long-term health burden." She added: "Time lags on the scale of months are possible. It depends on the location of the wildfires relative to the UK and the meteorology, but it took over three months for the effects of 2018 wildfires to become negligible to 2019 concentrations in the UK."

In 2019, almost half the wildfire pollution in the UK came from fires in Russia arriving on winds from the east and also from the west via circulation around the globe. Canadian fires dominated in 2023, setting a pattern for the next two years. The smoke from wildfires reacts chemically with our local pollution to produce even more particles. In some cases, these chemical reactions can double the amount of wildfire particles that we breathe. **Gary Fuller**

Around the world

Algiers	33	Lisbon	31
Ams'dam	22	Madrid	39
Athens	34	Malaga	30
Auckland	12	Melb'rne	16
B Aires	13	Mexico C	22
Bangkok	33	Miami	32
Barcelona	32	Milan	37
Basra	49	Mombasa	29
Beijing	37	Moscow	30
Berlin	22	Mumbai	31
Bermuda	30	N Orleans	33
Brussels	24	Nairobi	24
Budapest	33	New Delhi	29
C'hagen	20	New York	31
Cairo	36	Oslo	20
Cape Town	19	Paris	27
Chicago	30	Perth	17
Corfu	36	Prague	26
Dakar	32	Reykjavik	13
Dhaka	29	Rio de J	32
Dublin	22	Rome	33
Florence	39	Shanghai	34
Gibraltar	27	Singapore	32
H Kong	33	Stockh'm	20
Harare	24	Strasb'g	29
Helsinki	21	Sydney	18
Istanbul	31	Tel Aviv	31
Jo'burg	22	Tenerife	30
K Lumpur	33	Tokyo	32
K'mandu	28	Toronto	25
Kabul	32	Vancouv'r	24
Kingston	34	Vienna	30
Kolkata	30	Warsaw	25
L Angeles	30	Wash'ton	32
Lagos	28	Well'ton	13
Lima	25	Zurich	28

Sport

Rugby union

Springboks and All Blacks set for 'Greatest Rivalry'

Page 38 →

Athletics

West Ham deal clears way for London 2029 bid

Page 38 →

▲ *Saltburn Cricket Club found itself at the eye of an online storm after apparent chicanery in the slips was caught on camera*
GARY CALTON/THE GUARDIAN

Catching everything

From Clicky Ponting to viral blunders – the new era of amateur cricket livestreams

James Wallace

'Monday to Friday, people are sharing the content," says Rob Knee, chief executive of the cricket livestreaming company FrogBox. You can say that again. The story and accompanying footage of Brian Devine's apparent finger-clicking chicanery went around the world last week.

When Piers Morgan and Mike Brearley are wading into the discourse to give you a kicking on social media and a ticking off in the Sunday Times respectively, it is probably a sign things have got a bit out of hand. "We'd much rather see some outstanding catches, centuries and sixes being the cause of those viral moments," Knee says from Melbourne with the "Clicky Ponting" saga still rumbling.

Saltburn are one of 1,850 clubs, mainly in the UK and Australia, who have bought a livestreaming kit from the Australia-based company. As well as Cricket Australia, Cricket Scotland and Netherlands Cricket, FrogBox partners with the England and Wales Cricket Board. "We have access to their live scoring data, that then powers the on-screen graphics and also allows us to automate highlights."

Knee says FrogBox is expanding. They have posted more than three million cricket clips online and their kits (RRP £2,380) have sold out this year. They are already taking pre-orders for next season. Clubs have used their footage to secure sponsorships and funding and it is this, and the heartwarming side to livestreaming, Knee is keen to focus on, pointing out that parents can now have their child's first run or wicket captured. Special moments such as hat-tricks and centuries live on not just in memory, but as a permanent memento.

"When you are streaming over 1,000 games a weekend that is a potential quarter of a million highlights every single week. One of our first viral moments was a player whose day job is a taxi driver and he ended up smashing a six into his own cab. Thankfully, the clips that tend to do well are positive."

Nevertheless, the livestreaming of amateur cricket matches throws up some thorny issues about what constitutes a private and a public space. "We're the technology provider, but we require the clubs, and we presume it happens, [to make sure] everyone is aware the match is being streamed.

"The cameras have got pretty good audio and it's [about] making sure people know they can be heard as well. The clubs can make decisions on how public the streams are, so they can also determine them to be unlisted."

It is hard to shake the prevailing thought that the Saltburn story would slot perfectly into Jon Ronson's 2015 book So You've Been Publicly Shamed about the cruelty of social media and its insatiable thirst for a mass puritanical pile-on. Who among us can honestly say they haven't done something soul-crushingly embarrassing or bewilderingly out of character on the field of play, in the heat of the moment?

More widely, isn't one of the joys of playing cricket the escapism it offers? The eight or so hours where the outside world drifts away, your phone is stuffed in your shoe back in the pavilion and real life can't get you. Knee laughs as I put this to him, responding that he believes FrogBox adds to this sanctity as it ensures those special individual and team moments that happen on a weekly basis are preserved.

"Of course you get the odd player who gets given out and is immediately ripping off the pads and rewatching their decision, but our founding principles were much more guided by building cricket communities and fan engagement. Certainly that was our angle.

Isn't the joy of playing that level of cricket the kind of escapism it offers?

"Other companies come from more of a high performance and analytics world, but ours was always more about connection. That parents, family and friends who can't be at the game can still feel part of it.

"We also thought about the second and third XIs who don't always get to watch the first XI play. They train with them, but they never get to see them in action and vice versa. The various sides are then able to consume the other games, watch it from an away ground and so on. That creates a lot more of that kind of special camaraderie at clubs."

As well as the highs, the lows are captured too. Has Knee played in a FrogBox-streamed game? "I don't play so much any more, but certainly the local side I play for has FrogBox and I've been streamed doing some horrific things, getting out to very poor balls and all that type of stuff. It always gets a decent laugh around the place."

Professional cricket is being commodified wherever you look. It fits that this bleeds into the amateur game. One thing Knee says lingers long after our conversation. "There is a saying going around, that if it didn't happen on FrogBox did it even happen?"

As much as Knee can point to how the livestreaming of the amateur game can bring clubs together and capture golden moments for posterity it is hard to shake the sense that as some things are gained, others perhaps are lost.

"Look in the book," the cricketing adage goes. How long before this is replaced by "Check the streams"? All too soon for Brian Devine.

Cox, Pope and Lawrence get Test recalls

Continued from back page

final one-day international against India last month, is clearly a serious one, even if North could not provide more details.

Another potential curveball is Ollie Robinson and his partner awaiting the birth of their first child in "the next seven to 10 days". Robinson took seven wickets in the first Test against New Zealand at Lord's in June before sitting out of the remainder of the series. His cricket since amounts to three white-ball outings for Sussex.

North stressed that while the panel are always looking to the future – Cox at first-drop in his second Test outing is the rookie by way of caps – this was a squad selected for the here and now. After six defeats in their past eight Tests, England urgently need to get back to winning ways.

Not that this urgency means Stephen Fleming will start his new job as Test head coach straight away. Marcus Trescothick will perform the role against Pakistan with reports that Fleming has approached Mike Hussey about becoming the team's batting coach – the discipline Trescothick oversaw under Brendon McCullum.

But Fleming, North said, has been involved in "many lengthy conversations" leading into this selection and it would be "contradictory" not to reflect his vision for the side. This may not be outlined publicly until Fleming arrives in the UK next month, however, something one suspects Root wishes came sooner.

In terms of his teammates, there is a shortage of experience for Root to call on for advice during trickier moments on the field. Beyond Harry Brook, who was overlooked for the captaincy but is expected to be Root's deputy, Ben Duckett is the only other seasoned *consigliere* with more than 25 caps.

To that end, Ollie Pope returns as a reserve batter. Pope can cover most top-seven spots and keep wicket if Smith goes down injured on the morning of a game. But the recall also owes plenty to 64 caps, including five as a stand-in captain, and his knowledgable team-first outlook in the dressing room.

Beyond Fleming's delayed arrival or the loss of Stokes, spin may well be Root's biggest headache in the coming weeks. For all the investment in Bashir these past two years, it says plenty that England are intending to use two part-timers at the back end of what has been the driest summer for decades.

England Test squad

Joe Root *(Yorkshire, capt)*, **Jofra Archer** *(Sussex)*, **Gus Atkinson** *(Surrey)*, **Shoaib Bashir** *(Derbyshire)*, **Harry Brook** *(Yorkshire)*, **Brydon Carse** *(Durham)*, **Sam Cook** *(Essex)*, **Jordan Cox** *(Essex)*, **Ben Duckett** *(Notts)*, **Matthew Fisher** *(Surrey)*, **Emilio Gay** *(Durham)*, **Dan Lawrence** *(Surrey)*, **Ollie Pope** (Surrey), **Ollie Robinson** *(Sussex)*, **Jamie Smith** *(Surrey)*, **Josh Tongue** *(Notts)*

▼ *Campaigners fear the cost of padel courts is out of reach for many locals*
GETTY IMAGES

'Community spaces are being taken away': campaigners rail at rise of pay-to-play padel courts

Plans to convert skateparks, play areas and basketball courts in favour of booming sport have fuelled anger and fears of gentrification, writes **Joe Pinner**

Aiwa Saito and her children are among the many families who were regulars at Barking Skatepark. But after they skated here for more than five years, London's only full-size indoor skatepark closed on Sunday – to be replaced with padel courts.

Padel is one of the UK's fastest-growing sports, according to the Lawn Tennis Association, and the plan to convert Barking Skatepark is the latest in a series of proposals across London. However, some plans that have sought to build pay-to-play padel courts on top of existing spaces have angered residents and sparked claims of "gentrification" and community displacement.

Saito no longer feels she has a safe, indoor space in the capital to take her kids skating. "Outdoor skateparks aren't safe for children, particularly teenage girls," she says. "Parents already tell their girls: 'You have to be really careful when you go skateboarding, which park you go to. It's not safe.' And to take that away, with no alternative, is unacceptable."

Saito has high hopes for her 11-year-old daughter, Toko, who is on Skateboard GB's talent pathway programme and hopes to one day compete internationally. But after the closure of Barking Skatepark, Saito worries if she will be able to keep Toko's ambition alive. "To make her dreams come true, we need the right facilities," she says. "Without an indoor park, on a wet weekend in winter, where do we go? Where can she train?"

It is not just parents of aspiring Olympians who worry about the closure. "It's important to the local community," says Eleanor Dunlop, who led the campaign to save the venue. "Parents come here to socialise, they bring their kids to be active. Barking and Dagenham is one of the most deprived parts of the country, and people really need this space to be accessible. I've seen panic in people's faces when I told them that it could close, because they're saying: 'Where am I going to take my kids?'"

The council says that while it owns the freehold on the site, the skatepark (and wider sports complex) is run independently by a charity, GLL, which has the right to determine what sports it offers. Barking and Dagenham Council argues: "GLL has advised that the skatepark has been operating at a financial loss for a number of years and that it intends to replace it with indoor padel courts. It should be noted that equipment from Barking Skatepark has been distributed to skateparks in the wider area, and will be enjoyed by skateboarders for years to come."

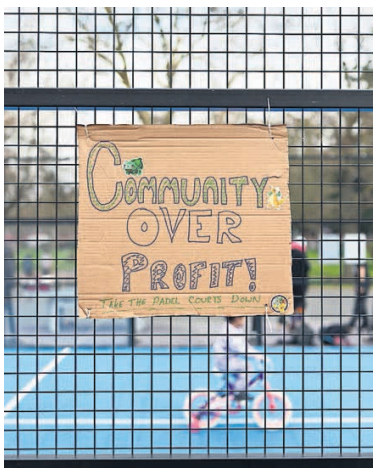
Part of the backlash to the "padel boom" among local residents can be explained by the cost of playing the sport, which at an average of £51 an hour for a court in London according to the racket sports app Playtomic, means that many feel they will not be the ones to benefit from new facilities. "It's so expensive, it just feels exclusive," Dunlop says.

The price and popularity of padel has attracted investors and private equity firms to build lucrative courts and clubs. According to LTA figures, in the past seven years alone the number of padel courts in the UK has increased by more than 2,500%, from 68 in 2019 to more than 1,800 today.

Saito says that before taking up skating, her daughter used to attend a community gymnastics centre in Beckton. That was until the building, a designated "asset of community value", was sold to a developer and converted into a private padel club – despite local opposition and an online petition signed by almost 10,000 people .

"One of her two sports was already taken away because of padel," she says, explaining that while the gymnastics club moved to Newham Leisure Centre, the facilities were not as specialised as those at Beckton and her daughter's friends all dispersed. "Now her main sport is going to be taken away. It just feels crazy."

'We need the right facilities. Without an indoor park on a wet weekend in winter, where do we go?'



▲ *Campaigners have demanded the court at Bethnal Green be removed*

In Bethnal Green, meanwhile, the local council installed a £24-an-hour, pay-to-play padel court in the middle of an open, multi-use area shared by people freely roller-skating, playing basketball and skateboarding.

"Being able to spontaneously come and go from a space like this, means one less financial restriction on how we use our free time – which in today's world is already inhibited by just how expensive everything is," says the campaigner Lillie Almond, who is fighting to remove the padel court.

"The padel court has obviously changed who's now using this space, and how," she adds. "This all results in the removal of culturally rich, diverse, long-standing communities – who are replaced with padel players."

In Camden, councillor Hamza Chowdhury campaigned to stop a free children's sandpit and play area being bulldozed to make way for padel courts. After more than a year of protests, the £2m proposal was rejected last week.

"If the goal was to get more people active, why not invest in a free, all-weather basketball or football court?" says Chowdhury. "Growing sport should never come at the cost of shrinking free public space. We should be adding to our communities, not taking away from them."

Oli Mould, professor of social, cultural and historical geography at Royal Holloway, University of London, says the plans in Camden, Bethnal Green and Barking reflect a broader pattern of rising gentrification across London.

"Gentrification is about the restriction of land," he says. "What's happening is people taking land away and putting a physical barrier around it – so it can be given to people who will pay. Any time that happens, that is gentrification."

Though Barking Skatepark closed on Sunday, Dunlop and her fellow campaigners are still fighting to halt construction. With backing from the local MP, Nesil Caliskan, and Skateboard GB, the sport's national governing body, as well as an online petition that has more than 4,500 signatures, she hopes they can stop the development, as Chowdhury did in Camden.

"Not listening to people who occupy a space, and then going in and changing it, is gentrification," Dunlop says. "I can't comment on padel as a sport, whether I like it or not. I just don't believe that it should displace the people who are already there. Having community spaces is so important – and they're being taken away."

A spokesperson for Tower Hamlets Council said the padel court at Bethnal Green Gardens is part of a trial using one out of five multi-use areas available. "The trial supports our work to increase access to a wider range of sports and improve the health and wellbeing of our residents," they said.

GLL and Camden Council have been approached for comment.

Springboks and All Blacks united in common purpose

Throwback series rekindles fond memories, but focus is very much on financial realities of modern game

Gerard Meagher

Just in case you were unaware that the series between South Africa and New Zealand, styled as Rugby's Greatest Rivalry (RGR), is a "tour like no other", the Springboks have just unveiled a jersey to prove it. "A jersey like no other" to be worn four times and then consigned to history.

The RGR, though, kicks off with a looming legal battle in South Africa in the background over the series' commercial identity and the unauthorised use of its branding. And you thought sporting romance was dead.

Enough of the cynicism. The series promises to be a blockbuster. It is a throwback, with New Zealand's men facing four matches against provincial sides, starting with the Stormers in Cape Town today, as well as four Tests against the Springboks, with the first on 22 August. The countries' women's sides also face each other in a one-off Test.

The series has further allure in just how rare tours such as this are these days. Add in the fact that the rugby calendar is pretty much barren at the moment and a series between the two best sides in the world is enough to quicken the pulse.

It is the first of its kind by New Zealand since 1996 – an unforgettable tour and the first won by the All Blacks on South African soil – a year after their World Cup final defeat at Ellis Park. The marketing departments have wasted no opportunity, to impressive effect, in evoking the history of this particular series, which dates back to 1921. Even the name is designed to do just that.

What it means for the future Test landscape is just as fascinating. RGR comes a few weeks after the launch of the inaugural Nations Championship – a competition that has effectively brought an end to traditional tours, certainly those made by northern hemisphere sides heading south.

The key exception remains the British & Irish Lions and it was instructive to hear Mark Alexander, president of the South African union, say he believes RGR can eclipse even those quadrennial tours. All the more so because the Lions are having their heads turned by advances from, among others, France and the lucrative potential of moving away from their traditional destinations. Should they do so, it would be financially catastrophic for South Africa, New Zealand and Australia, so it stands to reason they would seek to diversify revenue streams.

If RGR puts the launch of the Nations Championship in the shade somewhat – the Springboks' head coach, Rassie Erasmus, has barely tried to conceal which he has prioritised and opinion among the players would be pretty unanimous – South Africa and New Zealand have left Australia and Argentina hanging, too. There is no Rugby Championship this year, which feels like a mistake after the thrilling 2025 edition and, viewed through the lens of the Wallabies and Pumas, RGR seems a selfish move.

That said, who can really blame South Africa and New Zealand? They have won the past five World Cups between them and, unlike Australia, they have no realistic chance of hosting the tournament again any time soon. For all that the evocative history between the two sides is invoked, the imperatives for RGR are undoubtedly commercial, hammered home for those at the back by the fact the fourth and final Test takes place in the United States.

A lucrative add-on in Baltimore will swell the coffers further, strengthen both teams' brand awareness in the US and is welcome news for World Rugby, who are putting a brave face on it, but are desperate to ensure the 2031 World Cup does not pass unnoticed by the locals.

The benefits of RGR, beyond the bottom line, are obvious. South Africa would be quick to point out it was New Zealand's decision to break up the traditional Super Rugby format, but there is no doubt the All Blacks have been hurt by the absence of regular fixtures for their provinces against their South African counterparts. That the provincial sides will be shorn of their Springboks in the coming weeks detracts from the spectacle – it is a problem the Lions have run into on their past two tours – and ticket sales for today's opener have been slow, but it does allow the new All Blacks coach, Dave Rennie, to strengthen his player pool.

South Africa tick along with their provinces in the URC and their best players in Japan, but a conveyor belt of raw talent at home will benefit from playing the travelling All Blacks. Having a foot in both hemispheres does not seem sustainable with reports that the South African clubs are pulling out of the Champions and Challenge Cups, but it is a unique position for the double world champions. They continue to find new ways to thrive and new ways to set the benchmark despite the continued concentration of financial power in the north. RGR is just the latest.

▼ *South Africa and New Zealand share a long and rich rivalry*
TOM JENKINS/THE GUARDIAN

For all that the history between the sides is invoked, the imperatives are commercial

Cycling *Tour de France Femmes*

Reusser keeps lead as Le Court takes stage six

Jeremy Whittle
Tournon-sur-Rhône

Marlen Reusser retained the overall lead in the Tour de France Femmes from rival Demi Vollering after another broiling stage through central France saw Kim Le Court take the second Tour stage win of her career in Tournon-sur-Rhone.

The Mauritian rider Le Court recovered from a mechanical problem on the climb of the Col de Lalouvesc to join the day's breakaway group and outsprint Cédrine Kerbaol of France, and Queen of the Mountains classification leader, Puck Pieterse.

"I was on the limit," Le Court said of her winning sprint. "I can't believe I still had the legs to sprint. It was really hard, this close. I will never give up after the big effort my team did."

Le Court had originally been considered a contender for final victory but lost ground after Tuesday's time trial. "I've been really struggling since the time trial day but I think this really makes our Tour," she said. "We've still got ambitions for the general classification, but winning a stage in a Tour de France is very special."

Le Court's success is a popular one, after a season in which she has dealt with serial injuries. But she has also shown considerable sportsmanship, stopping to help Kasia Niewiadoma after the 2024 Tour Femmes winner crashed heavily in Milan-San Remo.

Despite missing out on the stage victory, it was a successful day for Pieterse as she now has 47 points in the mountain classification, the highest total ever recorded in the history of the Tour de France Femmes.

Marlen Reusser will have her lead tested on Mont Ventoux today

"I wanted to win the stage of course," Pieterse said, "but I think I did everything else today."

As the heatwave continued, the peloton raced over six classified climbs into the Ardeche, with today's ascent of Mont Ventoux now very much in their thoughts.

After three days she will want to forget, defending champion Pauline Ferrand-Prevot arrested the decline in her form and finished the stage in the group of favourites alongside Reusser, Vollering and Niewiadoma. She is still languishing in 15th place overall, five minutes behind race leader Reusser, and on Wednesday had conceded that: "It's over."

However, while her deficit seems almost insurmountable, her rivals will have taken note of her improved performance and of her experience of the Ventoux, which she first rode in 2021.

"I think it's the most iconic climb in France," Ferrand-Prevot said of the Provençal mountain. "Everyone knows about it, even if you're not a cyclist."

Athletics *World Championships*

Stadium deal enables bid for London 2029

Sean Ingle

London has submitted its bid for the 2029 World Athletics Championships after reaching an agreement with West Ham to allow it to host the event that September.

World Athletics is yet to announce the other candidate cities, but Rome, Munich and Nairobi have also submitted applications for 2029.

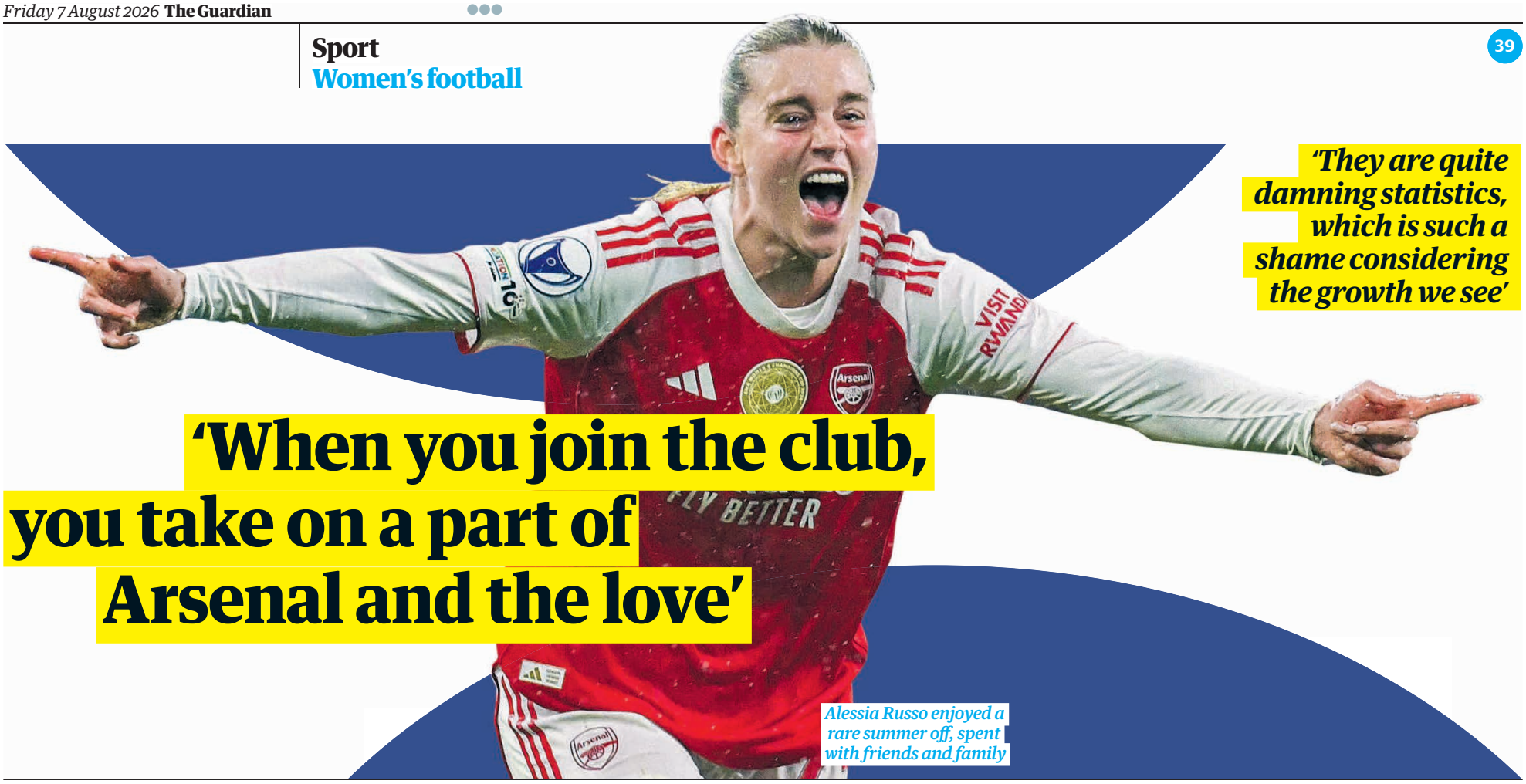
West Ham had threatened to thwart London's bid, arguing they had priority for the stadium during the football season. However, the impasse has been broken after lengthy discussions with the London mayor's office, Athletics Ventures, the joint organisation responsible for putting on major events, and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

If London is successful, West Ham will play no more than two consecutive away games in the Premier League or three in the EFL in the 2029-30 season.

Jack Buckner, the chief executive of UK Athletics and co-founder of Athletics Ventures, said: "Bidding to hold the World Athletics Championships in the London Stadium, the showpiece of London 2012, was always at the centre of the UK's Olympic legacy plans. We're delighted that we have reached agreement with the London Stadium and West Ham for the use of the London Stadium and our sincere thanks for their commitment in making this happen."

Hugh Brasher, the chief executive of London Marathon Events and co-founder of Athletics Ventures, said: "Our bid is not just about what happens within the London Stadium. Sport has the power to bring communities together, to change lives and to inspire the next generation. The 2029 World Athletics Championships in London would drive more than £400m in economic and social benefit."

World Athletics is scheduled to announce the host city after the Ultimate Championships in Budapest in September.



'When you join the club, you take on a part of Arsenal and the love'

Alessia Russo enjoyed a rare summer off, spent with friends and family

Alessia Russo, a converted Gooner, has sights on a double: more trophies and tackling grassroots funding issues

Suzanne Wrack

Arms hooked over the bar at the front of the bus, sunglasses on, a drink in one hand and the other pointed towards the fans as she moved to the music and joined in with the singing and chanting, Alessia Russo was having a blast.

"I had the time of my life that day," says the Arsenal forward of the 9km parade through the red smoke-filled streets of north London after Arsenal men's Premier League triumph and Arsenal women's Champions Cup success.

It has been a running joke among fans to refer to the 27-year-old as a "childhood Gooner", which was turbo-charged when the shirt a very small Russo was wearing in a family photo with the FA Cup was changed from a Manchester United one into an Arsenal one.

While she was not a childhood Gooner, she is fast becoming an adult one. "Since I've joined the club and seen the people around the place, it's impossible to not become a part of Arsenal and to feel like I support Arsenal," she says. "I want them to do well, I'm backing them every way, and the parade was just one of the most amazing things I've experienced. The fans, the atmosphere, celebrating the men winning the Prem, something they'd worked so hard for for so many years, I was just soaking it in, having fun and enjoying myself.

"It was just a really, really special day. It was nice to experience it with Lotte [Wubben-Moy] and Leah [Williamson] who are proper Gooners, but when you come to Arsenal you take on a part of it and start to understand and absorb their love for Arsenal. I definitely feel that and it's nice to feel like you're a part of something like that.

"You pick out moments where you win trophies as the main ones that stand out within your career, but that will definitely always stand out for me."

There were people everywhere, on every balcony, rooftop, bollard and traffic light, of all ages, races and religions. Young boys, but also, in contrast to the Arsenal parades of the 90s and noughties, so many young girls. Cultivating and supporting that fresh generation interested in watching and playing the game is something Russo is passionate about.

That is the reason she launched her own foundation this year and why she helped launch the fifth year of Starling Bank's Kick On initiative. This partners local businesses with girls' teams in need of sponsorship and subsidises the front-of-shirt sponsorship.

Starling commissioned surveys of 1,000 adult female players, 1,010 11-17 female players, 501 small- and medium-sized business leaders and 1,092 grassroots football coaches. Nearly every grassroots female football club (97%) said their team needed more funds, with opportunities for girls suffering as a result. The surveys found 76% of female players said they will have to drop out of their team or the sport altogether if more funding is not secured in the next five years, and 40% of female players said their team does not receive the same amount of funding as men's teams.

"They are quite damning statistics, which is such a shame considering the growth we see in the women's game," says Russo. "Over the past five or six years, the growth has just been incredible, but there's still work to do at the bottom to build it up."

The risk is that women's football loses momentum and fails to attract potential star players. "I always say you never want to miss out on the next Leah Williamson or Lotte Wubben-Moy, you don't want to miss out on talented young players just because they haven't got a local team, or the team that they were at folds," Russo says.

"I look back on all the people I met through my grassroots journey and every single one of them played a part in my career and I'm still friends with many of them. If local businesses can invest in one team, you never know, you might help produce a superstar who will always remember you being a part of it.

"There's more to it than just investment, it's that you can have a say in a core part of these young girls' journeys and lives."

With no major international women's tournament, Russo has enjoyed a rare summer off.

"It was important I did have some proper downtime," she says. "Over the past few years, the minutes and tournaments have increased, so I needed to look after my body and get myself in a good place mentally. I shut down for about two and a half weeks and just enjoyed time with friends and family, which was lovely, but by the end of it I was ready to start exercising again, I didn't know what to do with myself.

"I quite enjoy training on my own over the summer, you get to know your best routines and habits. I often go on holiday with my family and train out there, which is nice because everyone wants to get involved.

"I just took time for myself too, being a normal 27-year-old girl, going on holidays. I went to the England v Panama game in New York and got to be a fan and be around that buzz of the World Cup. I had Toonie's [England teammate Ella Toone] hen do and wedding, which was amazing."

Russo had a standout year in 2025-26; many believe her game moved up a level for club and country. "I'm pleased with my season for Arsenal and England from a personal point of view, but, ultimately, I'll always judge it on the trophies we win," she says.

"We've learned a lot as a team over the past couple of years at Arsenal, but are hungry for the new season. We've made it quite clear we want to do everything we can to be the team most capable of winning the WSL and Renée [Slegers, the coach] has set the standard high this pre-season.

"We've got seven new players, we've got a squad that's raring to go, the competition in it is high. I feel happy, but now I want to continue to push on with Arsenal and England and win trophies."

▲ *Alessia Russo enjoyed Arsenal's double celebration parade to the full*

Kerolin absent from City before Barça transfer

Tom Garry

The Brazil forward Kerolin failed to report back for pre-season training at Manchester City in July before her transfer to Barcelona had been agreed.

Barcelona announced their signing of the 26-year-old on Tuesday but it was not until yesterday evening when Manchester City first made any reference to the transfer, eventually confirming they had received a WSL record fee for a sale more than 48 hours later.

Several staff and players at Manchester City were disappointed at what were perceived to be efforts by Kerolin to force a transfer to Barcelona and that her time at the club ended on a surprisingly sour note. She did not join pre-season with the Women's Super League champions, which began in late July, despite previously having been felt to have been on good terms with the squad.

The deal, worth an initial €1.2m (£1m), represents the largest transfer fee received by a WSL club, and it could rise with add-ons to approximately £1.25m, although this has not been officially confirmed. It is one of the largest transfer fees in women's football.

City said of Kerolin: "She grabbed 14 goals and six assists during that time, helping City to a WSL and FA Cup double in her solitary full season in England. And upon her transfer to Barça, City have received a WSL-club record transfer fee of €1.2m.

"Everyone at Manchester City would like to thank Kerolin for all her efforts at the club and wish her the very best in her future career."

Kerolin was part of the City side that lifted their first WSL title in a decade last season and also helped them win the Women's FA Cup. But within weeks of those celebrations many of her colleagues have been stunned after she did not say goodbye in-person. Kerolin's representatives have been contacted for a response.

City and Barcelona will meet in a friendly at the Joie Stadium on 15 August as the reigning champions of England and Spain step up their pre-season preparations.

▼ *A mural of Mohamed Salah on the walls of a youth centre named after him in his home village of Nagrig*
DPA PICTURE ALLIANCE/ALAMY

Salah's story of success and sacrifice: 'Chasing a dream I had to reach'

'He was ready to sacrifice everything, he wanted to work hard, and liked to learn'

In this exclusive book extract, **Melissa Reddy** documents the lonely dedication and fortitude that was required at a young age to make his footballing vision a reality

The entrance to Al Mokawloon Al Arab's youth sector feels imposing. At first it is confusing to pinpoint the reason. Is it the facade; a mesh of thick concrete slabs, a marble-like trim that alters in colour depending on the light and the no-nonsense black steel gate?

Perhaps it is the stately signage of white block letters in Arabic juxtaposed against the dark background, with satellite pieces of information and announcements signifying importance. But to stop and pay attention to buildings around Nasr City in eastern Cairo is to notice that the blend of functional and decorative elements of the entrance, down to even the font and array of notices, is not unique.

The building's aura can be explained by the main image above its gates and the knowledge that to walk through them is to follow the footsteps a history-maker took from the age of 14. Mohamed Salah's face has pride of place above the gates; it is a reminder of where he's been, but, more pertinently, of why it is important to marry talent with discipline and determination.

Hamdi Nouh, Salah's first coach at Al Mokawloon and who he has referred to as a second father, knows that is because "he was ready to sacrifice everything, he wanted to work hard, and liked to learn". It sounds simple, until you start drilling at the heart of what it means for a boy from Nagrig to endure a nine-hour round trip five days a week to train in Cairo.

Salah's route has become so well known, you can read the tale of the minimum four buses he needed to take each way in Chinese, Spanish and every other major language. One from the T-junction at the edge of his village to reach Basyoun. The transfer from there to the capital of the Gharbia Governorate, Tanta. The great slog of around 100km to reach the rush of Ramses Square. A connection from Cairo's chaotic central transport hub to Nasr City. And, on the luckier days, a ride close to the club's gates to spare Salah having to run almost two kilometres up a steep hill to be on time for his training session. After four hours at the centre, he would leave to do that all again in reverse.

The problem with summarising the journey in this way, as it has been done since 2017 when Salah started shifting the parameters for greatness in the Premier League, is that it omits the reality of what this daily grind truly entailed.

When Nouh underlines sacrifice, part of it was Salah giving up his youth to sit shoulder slammed into shoulder, bodies filling up every available inch of the microbus and often even hanging off it, racing to the next stop and against the anxiety of missing a connection in a schedule that had no rhyme nor reason, with only enough cash for the exact journey. Salah weirdly enjoyed rather than endured the stressful odyssey.

"I didn't feel tired travelling when I was young," he said in 2022. "It's because I was doing something I wanted, chasing a dream I had to reach. I wasn't seeing my situation, I was seeing my goal. These are days I sit and think about, I'll never forget them and I still smile now when I remember everything."

▲ *Salah began his career at Al Mokawloon in 2010 before moving to Europe*
COURTESY OF AL MOKAWLOON

It is not the same for Umm Mohamed, who was averse to her eldest son spending only two hours at school, between seven and nine in the morning, and venturing so far away from his village, when lanes were seen as a mere suggestion and dangerous driving was the only type.

Her memories were of worry and fear prompted by the high number of crashes involving microbuses. One major accident along her son's route provoked sheer panic, which only increased as his phone rang unanswered. She tried calling more than 20 times. While Salah insists exhaustion didn't grip him during his great trek, he didn't pick up because he was fast asleep.

She was also concerned if he had enough money, as was her husband, Salah Ghaly, who worked as a government administrator and traded in jasmine. He funded Salah's football path, first to Ittihad in Basyoun, which was a half-hour trip, then on to the Othmason club in Tanta, 90 minutes away, all before he became a teenager, followed by the almighty mission to Al Mokawloon.

Salah was eight when he started training there and rushed at opponents with the fearlessness of a microbus driver. "He was small, but his left foot and his shots were powerful," says Ghamri Abdel-Hameed el-Saadani, who was the juniors coach at the youth centre. "He was fast and could do things with the ball the other boys couldn't."

Salah's father knew it and despite his own apprehensions about the big city and how it could swallow and spit out young hopefuls he told Umm Mohamed they were doing the right thing.

Back to the entrance of Al Mokawloon's youth sector and just behind the black steel gates lies a story that hasn't travelled the world like the bus trip. One of Salah's teammates had suggested they could stay at his uncle's house in Greater Cairo for the week. It was located in the 10th of Ramadan City and it took plenty of convincing for his parents to green-light the sleepover. Salah's father gave him 60 Egyptian pounds and he set off. When they arrived at the house, in the black of the night, his friend's uncle was not there. They were stuck, with not enough money or knowledge to find other lodgings.

All Salah knew of Cairo were the roads through it to train at Al Mokawloon. His friend, whose name he doesn't want to reveal to avoid the media frenzy that accompanies any detail about his life, suggested the house of someone else he knew not too far away. When they got there, Salah encountered a bigger problem.

The dwelling was in a cemetery, a saddening - and scary - symptom of Cairo's severe housing shortage and high population density. Salah was not going to stay in the necropolis. His friend had one final plan: he knew an on-site administrator at Al Mokawloon who could let them in. They laid out the sheets they had packed on the floor into two makeshift beds.

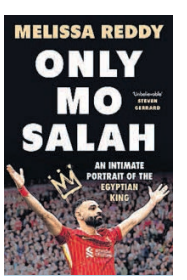
Salah used his shoes as a pillow and set his alarm for 6am so the pair could be up before anyone caught them and the administrator got in trouble. They packed up their bedding and headed off, returning to the complex at 9am as though they had just arrived.

The sleeping arrangement stayed secret, but needed to be amended. The next day, the duo slept on Field 2 of the four pitches, in the open under the cold night sky. In the morning, they would again go into covert mode and Salah enjoyed that he could be early for training.

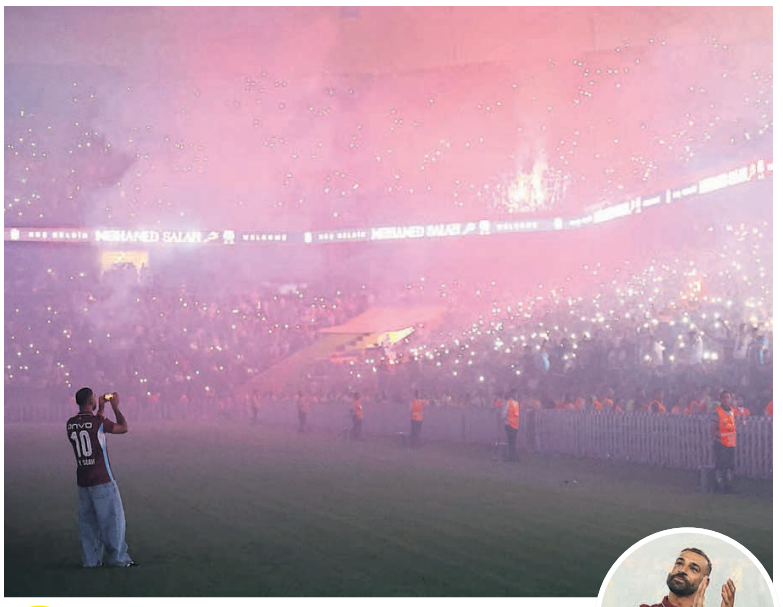
He had already packed in a lifetime's worth of sacrifice, effort and lessons by his 18th birthday. The moment he will never forget, however, was when he joined the first team group and moved into the Al Mokawloon's residences.

"Not everyone could stay there, so psychologically I felt like I became someone, like a star," Salah said. "I used to see players finish training and go upstairs, while I would leave to take the journey back to Nagrig. I'd think, 'One day I'll go up there.'"

He would go higher than any other Egyptian footballer.



● *This is an edited extract from Only Mo Salah: An intimate portrait of the Egyptian King by Melissa Reddy, by Orion Publishing*



UMIT BEKTAS/REUTERS

Salah signs in and hits £14.5m jackpot

Mohamed Salah has signed a two-year deal with Trabzonspor and the Egypt forward will receive €17m (£14.5m) a season. The announcement to the Turkish stock exchange came before Trabzonspor fans headed to the club's stadium for a ceremony to mark the 34-year-old former Liverpool player's signing on a free transfer, the day after he arrived in Istanbul in the team's kit. Salah will receive a 20% share from products sold under his name, plus conditional bonuses each season. **PA Media**

Results

Football

CARABAO CUP

First round

Bristol City	(0) **0**	**Walsall** Pressley 47	(0) **1**

EUROPA LEAGUE

Third qualifying round: first leg

Benfica Rafa 3, Araújo 23 Pavlidis 42pen Prestianni 59, Durán 87 Schjelderup 90+4pen	(3) **6**	**Hearts** Renaud 72	(0) **1**
Jagiellonia Fernandez 13og, Szmyt 21	(2) **2**	**Rangers** Montóia 4og	(1) **1**

Hradec Kralove 0 Besiktas 1; KuPS 1 Universitatea Craiova 1; Lech Poznan 1 KÍ Klaksvik 0; Lincoln Red Imps 1 Omonia 1; Maccabi Tel-Aviv 0 CSKA Sofia 3; Paok 0 Anderlecht 1; RB Salzburg 1 Pafos 0; Thun 3 Víkingur Reykjavík 0

CONFERENCE LEAGUE

Third qualifying round: first leg

Hibernian Elding 73, O'Hora 90	(0) **2**	**Shkendija** Gjorgjievski 76	(0) **1**
HJK Pukki 71	(0) **1**	**Motherwell** Maswanhise 64pen	(0) **1**

Ajax 3 Shelbourne 1; Beitar Jerusalem 1 Austria Vienna 2; Bohemians 0 Midtjylland 2; Borac Banja Luka 1 Vitebsk 0; Braga 1 Dinamo Minsk 0; CFR Cluj 0 Tromsø 5; Debrecen 0 Copenhagen 3; Dynamo Kyiv 1 Qarabag 0; Hapoel Tel-Aviv 2 GKS Katowice 0; IFK Göteborg 0 Gent 1; Inter D'Escaldes 2 Flora Tallinn 0; Inter Turku 2 Vaduz 1; Jablonec 2 RFS 0; Lugano 2 NSÍ 0; Noah 2 Sion 2; Paide 1 Rapid Vienna 4; Partizan Belgrade L Tobol Kostanay L; Rakow Czestochowa 0 Hammarby 0; Riga 1 Gyori ETO 0; Rijeka 1 Ilves 0; Sheriff 1 St Gallen 3; Tre Fiori 1 Drita 4; Twente 6 DAC 1904 0; Valur Reykjavík 0 Nordsjaelland 2; Zalgiris 2 Hajduk Split 5

Cricket

THE HUNDRED MEN

Lord's London Spirit 160-5 (LG Pretorius 52). MI London 164-6. MI London beat London Spirit by four wickets.

THE HUNDRED WOMEN

Lord's MI London 122-9 (AC Kerr 69no). London Spirit 119-8. MI London beat London Spirit by three runs.

Rugby league

BETFRED SUPER LEAGUE

St Helens 18 Hull FC 32

BETFRED WOMEN'S SUPER LEAGUE

St Helens 6 Wigan 44

Tennis

ATP NATIONAL BANK OPEN (Montreal, Canada)

Second round: L Tien (US) bt G Monfils (Fr) 6-3 0-6 6-3; **T Paul** (US) bt V Royer (Fr) 6-4 7-6 (7-5); **T Droguet** (Fr) bt J Faria (Por) 7-6 (7-2) 6-2; **B van de Zandschulp** (Neth) bt D Medvedev (Rus) 6-3 7-6 (7-5); **L Darderi** (It) bt Shang J (Chn) 4-6 6-1 6-4; **A Fils** (Fr) bt M Navone (Arg) 6-3 6-2.

WTA NATIONAL BANK OPEN (Toronto, Canada)

Second round: A Eala (Phi) bt A Parks (US) 6-1 4-6 6-2; **M Joint** (Aus) bt S Cirstea (Rom) 6-4 6-4; **L Fernandez** (Can) bt R Zarazúa (Mex) 6-2 6-2; **E Alexandrova** (Rus) bt T Gibson (Aus) 5-7 6-1 6-3; **D Shnaider** (Rus) bt A Kalinskaya (Rus) 6-3 6-3; **I Swiatek** (Pol) bt V Golubic (Swi) 6-2 6-1.

Golf

PIF LONDON CHAMPIONSHIP (St Albans)

Leading first-round scores (GB/Ire unless stated)
67 A Huang (Can). **68** K Bennett (Aus); E Spitz (Aut). **69** C Heath. **70** A Krauter (Ger); S Tan (Sin); A Nobilio (It); O Cowan (Ger); A Zanusso (It); A Donegan; L Rydqvist (Swe). **71** L Sobron (Sp); P Urs (Ind); L Pace (SA); L Hall; E Young; A Ashok (Ind); G Clews. **72** A Lee (US); J Rosenberg (US); E Hamilton; C Gainer; S Kouskova (Cz); M Folke (Swe); D Darquea (Ecu); A van Dam (Neth); A Pelaez (Sp); C Sattelkau (Ger); C Noja (Ger); J Bosio (Aus); K Napoleaova (Cz).

Cycling

TOUR DE FRANCE FEMMES

Stage six (Montbrison-Tournon-sur-Rhone, 153.0km): **1** K Le Court (Mri) AG Insurance-Soudal 4hr 1min 48sec; **2** C Kerbaol (Fr) EF Education-Oatly; **3** P Pieterse (Neth) Fenix-Premier Tech; **4** S Van Dam (Can) Visma | Lease a Bike; **5** C Gery (Fr) FDJ United-Suez all at the same time.
General clasification: 1 M Reusser (Swi) Movistar 19hr 43min 34sec; **2** D Vollering (Neth) FDJ United-Suez +0:12; **3** K Niewiadoma-Phinney (Pol) Canyon//Sram +1:17; **4** E Longo Borghini (It) UAE Team L'IMAD +2:28; **5** A Niedermaier (Ger) Canyon//Sram +2:40.

TOUR DE POLOGNE (Poland)

Stage four (Zagan-Karpacz, 175.5km): **1** B Lemmen (Neth) Visma | Lease a Bike 3hr 54min 45sec; **2** C Scaroni (It) XDS Astana at same time; **3** A Laurance (Fr) Netcompany Ineos Cycling +0:14; **4** M Brenner (Ger) Tudor Pro Cycling; **5** L Barre (Fr) Visma | Lease a Bike at same time.
General classification: 1 B Lemmen (Neth) 16hr 16min 12sec; **2** C Scaroni (It) +0:06; **3** M Brenner (Ger) +0:26; **4** M Sobrero (It) Lidl-Trek +0:27; **5** F Fisher-Black (NZ) Red Bull-Bora-hansgrohe +0:28.

Fixtures

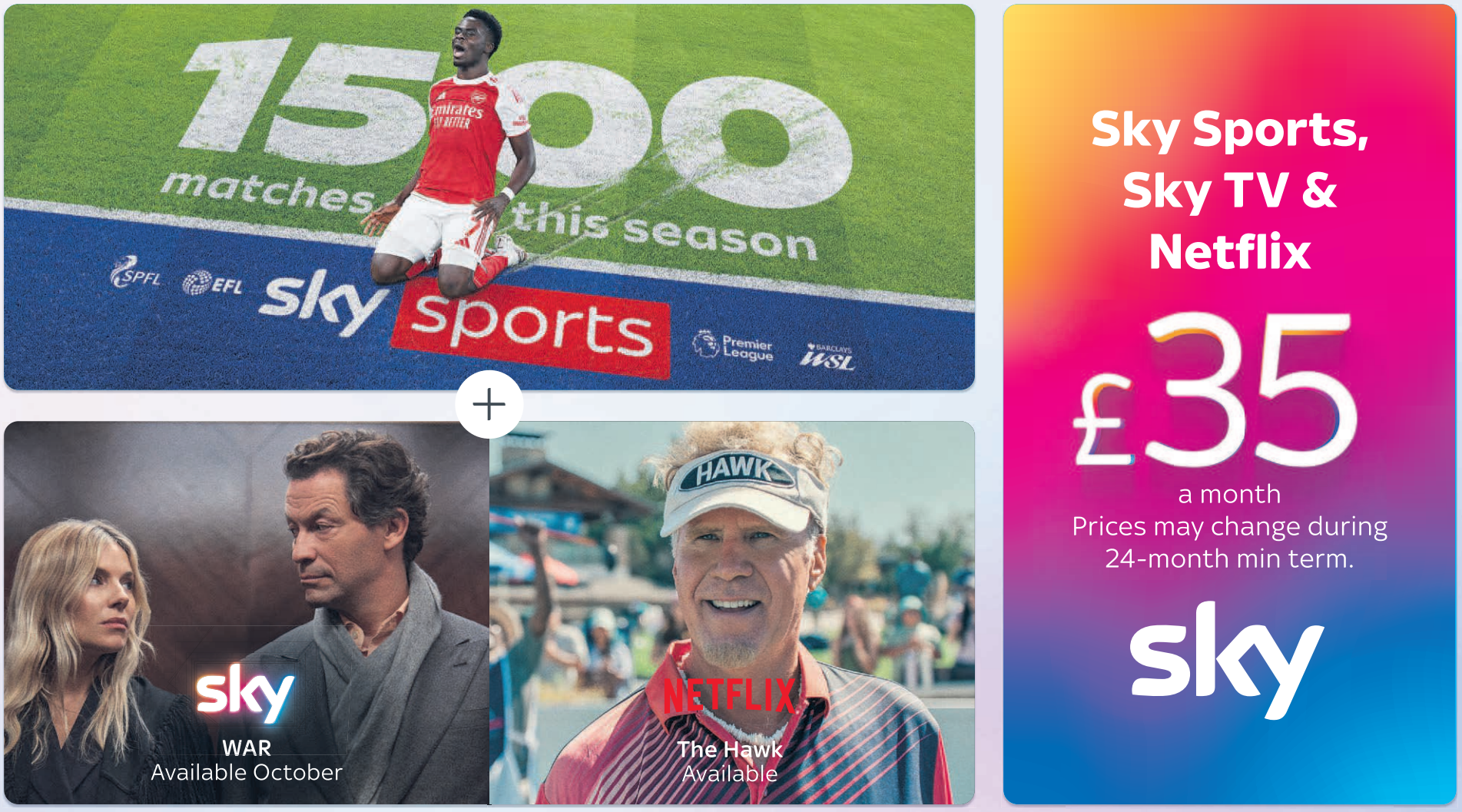
Football (7.45pm unless stated)
Carabao Cup
First round Middlesbrough v Wrexham (8pm); Wolves v Port Vale; Wycombe v Stevenage
William Hill Scottish Championship
Partick v Livingston (7.30pm)
JD Cymru Premier
Airbus UK v Cardiff MU; Ammanford v Colwyn Bay; Caernarfon v Penybont; Cambrian v Briton Ferry; Flint v Barry; Holywell v Connah's Quay; TNS v Haverfordwest; Trefelin v Llandudno
Sports Direct NIFL Premiership
Cliftonville v Crusaders
Women's Champions League
Second qualifying round: Third-place final Breidablik v Dinamo-BGU (8am). **Final** Servette Chênois v Aktobe (3pm)

Rugby league (8pm unless stated)
Betfred Super League
Castleford v Hull KR; Leigh v York; Wakefield v Leeds

Cricket (11am unless stated)
Metro Bank One Day Cup Men
Group A Lancashire v Gloucestershire, Old Trafford; Leicestershire v Warwickshire, Grace Road (2pm); Nottinghamshire v Northamptonshire, Chesterfield; Somerset v Surrey, Taunton (2pm).
Group B Durham v Middlesex, Riverside (1.30pm); Glamorgan v Essex, Sophia Gardens; Sussex v Worcestershire, Hove (2pm); Yorkshire v Derbyshire, Scarborough
The Hundred Men
Birmingham Phoenix v SunRisers Leeds, Edgbaston (6.30pm)
The Hundred Women
Birmingham Phoenix v SunRisers Leeds, Edgbaston (3pm)
Men's One-Day International
Ireland vs Afghanistan, Bready (10.45am)
World Cup League Two Tri-Series
Scotland v Canada, Dundee (11am)

Greg Wood's racing tips

Musselburgh 1.50 Falcon Nine **2.20** Minster Man **2.50** Bigalo **3.20** Jonny Concrete (nap) **3.50** Woohoo (nb) **4.24** Roc De Fer **4.54** Misemerald
Thirsk 2.10 Tickets **2.40** My Maria **3.10** Love Tanya **3.40** Azuinthejungle **4.10** Master Vintner **4.40** Maximum Velocity
Brighton 2.30 Diomed Spirit **3.00** Enamored **3.30** Celebrating Ethel **4.00** U S S Charleston **4.30** Dragon God **5.00** She's Got The Blues
Newmarket 5.27 Netherstream **6.02** Oh Sweet Adare **6.37** Nabati **7.12** Fenlander **7.47** Hilltop **8.22** Lucky Hero
Haydock 5.43 Ancestor **6.18** Caph Star **6.53** Rotelle **7.28** Arthurian **8.03** Silver Sovereign **8.38** Distinct Spirit



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Dirt cheap?
Uefa to check Fifa valuation of World Cup

European governing body to request an independent report into whether Gianni Infantino offered stakes below market rate

Matt Hughes

Uefa plans to commission an independent valuation of Fifa's World Cup sale plans after concerns that Gianni Infantino agreed to sell the tournament's future profits to a private equity firm at below the market rate.

The European governing body is unmoved by the written apology issued by Infantino to Fifa's 211 member associations on Tuesday after crisis talks in Morocco. It will continue to push for his removal, with its tactics including further scrutiny of a proposal the president belatedly conceded was "a mistake".

The Fifa Forward Enterprise plan that was abandoned last week after four days involved a 21% stake being sold to Thrive Capital for $4.2bn (£3.1bn). The US private equity firm is led by Joshua Kushner, the brother of Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner.

Uefa played a key role in Fifa's U-turn, which was triggered by all 55 member associations threatening to boycott the World Cup and other tournaments, and is now seeking to establish how the $20bn valuation of Fifa's commercial assets was worked out. Uefa has spoken to several market analysts to seek opinions regarding an independent valuation and a formal study is likely to follow once the storm surrounding Infantino's immediate future has passed.

Last week, the Fifa sales deck circulated details that did not contain any information of the valuation process or any evidence of a competitive tender. "We need to find out if they were selling the World Cup at a knockdown price," a source with knowledge of Uefa's plans said. "How did they get to $20bn? Was it a robust process?" Fifa's revenues for the four-year cycle that culminated in this summer's World Cup were $15bn, leading the market analysts to suggest that $20bn was a low valuation, particularly as the proposal did not appear to include any provisions to prevent expansion and the creation of new tournaments.

"The World Cup is the only genuinely global mass entertainment event so an increase of $5bn on current revenues seems low to me," the source said. "This looks like a low-ball offer. The obvious financial upside of further expansion that the investors would demand - more teams, more

$15bn

*Fifa's **revenues** for this summer's World Cup, so a valuation of $20bn seems below the market rate*

Global body's backing for president fails to stave off boycott threat

Continued *from back page*

early rush to make such declarations has slowed. The Football Association has now written to Fifa formally retracting its backing.

Uefa's repeat of its boycott threat was followed by a scathing release from Fifpro. Before the World Cup Fifpro signalled its intention to work with Fifa but that has proved the briefest of truces.

Alongside the criticism, Fifpro wrote to Fifa making a series of demands, including giving players voting rights on the Fifa council, which is supposed to be the main decision-making body but has often been bypassed by Infantino. "Fifa Forward Enterprise is gone, but the abuse of power that produced it is not," Fifpro said. "Governance reforms, not a cover-up, are urgently needed. The withdrawal of FFE was inevitable. But withdrawing the proposal does not erase what it revealed.

"A plan capable of permanently altering the ownership and governance of the Fifa World Cup ... was conceived in secrecy, negotiated behind closed doors and brought to the brink of agreement before the Fifa council, the member associations, players and football's recognised stakeholders even knew it existed. That is not merely a governance failure. It is a profound abuse of presidential power."

Conmebol, three of whose members are in line to host matches at the 2030 World Cup, had waited more than a week to comment publicly. In a statement it said the Conmebol council "unanimously expresses its concern regarding the repeated unilateral actions taken without resorting to dialogue or to the institutional mechanisms established to address situations of this nature".

Earlier yesterday the Jordan Football Association president, Prince Ali bin al-Hussein, said Fifa had paid bonuses owed from last December's Arab Cup but clarified he would still oppose Infantino.

The money appears to have materialised after Prince Ali accused Fifa of "blackmail", saying the governing body had threatened to withhold funds if Jordan refused to back Infantino's re-election.

"Thank you to the Fifa administration for suddenly this morning delivering what was owed to our players and coaching staff, for the Jordan national team's accession to

◀ *Gianni Infantino hands the World Cup to Donald Trump before it is presented to Spain*
AYMAN AREF/ NURPHOTO/ SHUTTERSTOCKX

regular World Cups, more Club World Cups – is not priced in."

Uefa has also called for a review of Fifa's governance and threatened it with legal action. Fifa is attempting to put on a united front despite scathing internal criticisms of the sell-off plan from leading figures including the secretary general, Mattias Grafström, the chief operating officer, Kevin Lamour, and Arsène Wenger, head of football development.

Infantino appeared alongside Grafström at a Women's Africa Cup of Nations group game between Malawi and Zambia in Morocco on Wednesday after attending crisis talks in Rabat. That was followed by a Fifa statement saying the president retained the "full support" of the organisation.

Such apparent support indicates the push for change will have to come from outside the organisation.

Fifa was approached for comment.

the final of the Fifa Arab Cup in Qatar last December," he wrote.

"This was funding that should have been received eight months ago … It is symptomatic of those exact difficulties that we all face, and that are usually linked to the Fifa presidential elections. And it does not change my clear position concerning the leadership of Fifa: my FA and I will not endorse president Infantino, nor will we vote for him."

Meanwhile yesterday, the executive committee of the African confederation (Caf) unanimously confirmed its support for Infantino.

Barcelona step up Rodri interest as Real Madrid talks with City star stall

Ed Aarons

Barcelona have stepped up their attempts to hijack Real Madrid's move to sign Rodri from Manchester City.

While City have not given up hope that Spain's World Cup-winning captain will sign a new contract after he entered the final year of his deal, they are thought to be willing to allow him to leave for about £60m. Despite weeks of talks with Rodri and his representatives, Real have yet to reach an agreement and Barcelona are hoping to take advantage.

It is understood that Rodri spoke to their manager, Hansi Flick, and sporting director, Deco, about a potential move on Wednesday and indicated he is keen to return to Spain. Barça, who will be without midfielder Frenkie de Jong for several months after the Netherlands midfielder sustained a knee injury, are now expected to make contact with City to negotiate the structure of the fee for the 30-year-old, who won the Golden Ball for the World Cup's best player.

Real, who have signed RB Leipzig's Yan Diomande for a club record fee of £115m, have also agreed a lucrative six-year contract extension with Vinícius Júnior to ward off interest from Arsenal. They may have to offload players first if they are to sign Rodri as well. Aurélien Tchouaméni and Eduardo Camavinga are possible departures, with Manchester United having been linked with the France midfielders.

Rodri has had minor surgery on his back and will miss most of City's pre-season programme. They have signed Elliot Anderson from Nottingham Forest for £116m and remain in negotiations with Lille over a deal for the 18-year-old Morocco midfielder Ayyoub Bouaddi.

Meanwhile, Barcelona have been frustrated in their efforts to persuade Atlético Madrid to sell Julián Alvarez. After Robert Lewandowski's departure, Barcelona have targeted Alvarez all summer, but Atlético continue to insist the Argentina striker is not for sale at any price.

Deco was in the Spanish capital to meet Alvarez's representatives on Wednesday. All eyes will be on whether the 26-year-old former City forward will return to pre-season training on Monday or attempt to force through a transfer. Arsenal also retain an interest in him.

Ferran Torres – who scored the winning goal for Spain in the World Cup final – has entered the final year of his contract at Barcelona and said he is waiting for them to begin talks over extending his deal. "All I know is that I have to be in training for Barcelona on 12 August. Let's see what happens."

▶ *Rodri is thought to be available for around £60m but City have not given up hope of keeping him*
MARTIN RICKETT/PA

Europa League

Rangers left with work to do while Hearts fall apart

Rangers paid the price for sloppy defending as they let slip an early lead to lose 2-1 to Jagiellonia Bialystok in Poland in the first leg of their Europa League third qualifying round tie.

Derek McInnes's first European match as Rangers manager got off to a dream start when home defender Guilherme Montóia turned a Tuur Rommens cross into his own net after just four minutes. However, Kajetan Szmyt levelled in the 13th minute to rattle the away side then added a second eight minutes later after defensive slackness from the visitors.

Rangers dominated possession in the second half but could not find a way to equalise, with Findlay Curtis hitting a post in added time, and they will have to turn the tie around at Ibrox next week.

Meanwhile, Hearts endured a bruising evening in Lisbon, a 6-1 thrashing by Benfica all but ending their hopes of progressing.

The home side opened the scoring in the third minute, led by three at the break and then added another three in the second half to remove all sense of jeopardy from next Thursday's second leg at Tynecastle.

While Benfica are on course to face the losers of the Champions League tie between Aarhus and Sabah Baku in the Europa League playoff round, Hearts are staring at a likely Conference League playoff against Rapid Vienna. **PA Media**

Argentina to mark semi-final win over England with 'tribute' day

Argentina's World Cup semi-final win over England last month is being commemorated by the country's football association, the AFA, which has established 15 July as National Football Teams Day.

"The date was chosen to commemorate Argentina's historic victory over England in the World Cup semi-final," an article on the AFA's official website stated after a meeting of its executive board on Wednesday. "Lionel Scaloni's team was trailing the English side by a single goal, but with goals from Enzo Fernández and Lautaro Martínez, they turned the game around, sending the entire nation into a frenzy of celebration.

"But the tribute isn't just for that milestone achieved by the senior national team. The recognition, of course, also extends to each and every one of the national teams [youth, men's and women's, futsal, beach soccer, and field football], who train daily at the Lionel Andrés Messi training complex with the hope, joy and responsibility of representing Argentina."

Fifa has opened disciplinary proceedings against the AFA over the display of a banner by players at the end of that match proclaiming the Falkland Islands belong to Argentina.

Leandro Paredes and Nahuel Molina are also being investigated by Fifa over their involvement in the brawl that followed the 1-0 defeat by Spain in the World Cup final. **PA Media**

◀ *Argentina players display a banner referring to the Falkland Islands after their World Cup semi-final victory against England*
MB MEDIA/ GETTY IMAGES

Football In brief

Uganda

International Owori killed by robbers

The Ugandan football community is in mourning after the death of a player during a robbery in the capital, Kampala. David Owori, who captained Sports Club Villa, a Uganda Premier League club, and represented the national team at youth level, was attacked on Tuesday night after resisting an attempt to steal his mobile phone and other belongings. The 27-year old was a right-back and midfielder for SC Villa and helped the team win a record 17th Uganda Premier League title in 2024. **Carlos Mureithi**

Australia

Two Iranian footballers granted citizenship

Two female Iranian footballers have been granted Australian citizenship after being called traitors at home for refusing to sing the national anthem before a game. Fatemeh Pasandideh and Atefeh Ramezanisadeh were members of a group of seven from Iran's delegation who asked for Australia's protection after the protest during the women's Asian Cup in March. Their demands for protection were an embarrassment for Iran's leaders, but five changed their minds and returned home. Pasandideh and Ramezanisadeh stayed, however, and were granted citizenship at a ceremony. The plight of the rest of the team remains unclear since their return to Iran. **AFP**

Bournemouth

Sevilla full-back Juanlu joins in £11.1m move

Bournemouth have completed an £11.1m deal for the Sevilla right-back Juanlu as the new head coach, Marco Rose, finalises his squad for the club's first season in Europe. The former Spain Under-21 international has signed a five-year contract for an initial £9.4m fee and could cost a further £1.7m in add-ons. The 22-year-old is Bournemouth's third signing of the summer after the transfers of Antonio Silva from Benfica and Álvaro Rodríguez from Elche. Elsewhere, England goalkeeper James Trafford has completed a club-record move to Leeds after undergoing a succesful medical. Leeds agreed a £40m fee plus add-ons with Manchester City for the 23-year-old. **PA Media**

Sport

Russo on a roll

'The parade was one of the most amazing things ever'

Page 39 →

£60m stunner

Barcelona ready to hijack Real's hopes of signing Rodri

Page 43 →

The Uefa president, Aleksander Ceferin (left), does not see eye to eye with his Fifa counterpart, Gianni Infantino
NICK POTTS/PA

'Profound abuse of power' Union turns on Infantino as Uefa sticks to boycott threat

Nick Ames
Matt Hughes

Uefa has doubled down on its threat to boycott Fifa-run competitions and reiterated its loss of confidence in Gianni Infantino's presidency.

The latest damning intervention from European football's governing body came as criticism of Infantino continued to rain in from several angles. The global players' union, Fifpro, condemned "a profound abuse of presidential power" while the South American confederation, Conmebol, usually a strong Infantino ally, was moved to chastise "repeated unilateral actions taken without resorting to dialogue".

It is Uefa's continued stance, though, that may damage Infantino most severely. In a statement it said Fifa's public backing of Infantino on Wednesday night "changes nothing" and explained it was not convinced repeats of the past nine days' crisis will not occur.

Last week Uefa's 55 member associations agreed to boycott Fifa tournaments if Infantino did not withdraw his privately funded Fifa Forward Enterprise (FFE) scheme and, although the plan was scrapped last Friday, it said the terms necessary to avert the boycott have not been met.

"Uefa's associations were very clear about the conditions attached to their non-participation in Fifa competitions," it said. "First, the proposals to sell off the major competitions had to be withdrawn and, secondly, assurances have to be made that such attempts to disfigure the game in this way will never be made again.

"These conditions have not been met. In addition, Uefa made it abundantly clear in its statement on Saturday that it has lost confidence in Gianni Infantino's presidency. That position holds. Yesterday's announcement that some people employed by the Fifa president (and whose careers depend on his favour) agree with him changes nothing."

It heightens the turmoil enveloping football's governance. If no accord is reached before the Under-20 Women's World Cup, which begins in Poland on 5 September, that would be the first tournament subjected to a Uefa-led boycott.

Uefa remains hopeful it can exploit divisions within Fifa's leadership despite the Infantino-led show of unity following Wednesday's meeting of some of its management board in Rabat.

There were several notable absentees, however, and it is understood that Arsène Wenger declined an invitation to travel to Morocco in his capacity as Fifa's chief of global development because of a desire to distance himself from Infantino. The former Arsenal manager had launched a scathing attack on the World Cup sell-off plans, saying it was "absolutely necessary and beyond question" that they were scrapped.

In contrast to Wenger, Fifa's chief operating officer, Kevin Lamour, who had described the proposals as "the project of one person", was not invited to the summit in a development that will raise further questions over his future. Additionally Jill Ellis, the chief football officer, and Sarai Bareman, the chief women's football officer, were not present in Rabat.

While Fifa has sent apologies to the Fifa council and member associations for their exclusion from the FFE process, it is believed that those sentiments failed to sway a large percentage of council members.

A handful of Uefa federations have withdrawn letters of support for Infantino's re-election for a fourth term, although the 42 →

England rely on strength in numbers for post-Stokes era

Ali Martin

On paper, the answer to how England will replace Ben Stokes for the Test series against Pakistan appears to be to throw bodies at the problem and have options. A 16-strong squad has been selected for the first two Tests starting on 19 August, akin to a touring party and at risk of being bloated.

Although on announcing the squad yesterday – a group that has Jordan Cox slated to bat at No 3, with Jacob Bethell missing the series with a knee injury – the national selector, Marcus North, laid out the intended structure of the XI that will play under Joe Root when he dutifully returns to the captaincy.

The void left by Stokes will initially be filled by Dan Lawrence, who is back after two years on the sidelines and will bat at No 6 ahead of wicketkeeper Jamie Smith. Lawrence's whirligig off-breaks, plus Root, will allow four frontline quicks to play at Headingley and Lord's, two grounds where spin has a lesser role.

While confirming this, North also gave a strong endorsement of Sam Curran as the intended seam-bowling all-rounder down the line. Post-Stokes, Curran or similar appears the only way Shoaib Bashir – a spinner who offers precious little with the bat – can get into the side on seam-friendly pitches at home.

Curran is battling fitness niggles, however, and is not likely to be up to speed until the third Test. In the meantime, Lawrence has the chance to show he is an improved player since the last of his 14 outings.

Cox is something of a wildcard at No 3, even if he had spells opening for Kent before his move to Essex two years ago. Bethell's knee problem, which has put him 37 → out of action since the

Dan Lawrence is back to bat at No 6 for Joe Root's side

By day five of my labour, all I wanted was to survive *Natalie Morris, page 3*

I knew Rod Liddle – and I hated what he became *Zoe Williams, page 4*

Franco Baresi, footballer who played for AC Milan and Italy *Obituaries, page 6*

G2 Daily pullout life & arts section *Inside*

The Guardian Friday 7 August 2026

Journal

Opinion and ideas

Big food firms are panicking. Their time may be running out

Felicity Lawrence

It is rare for people to drop dead holding the incriminating packaging, but there is no longer any serious doubt that consuming a diet of ultra-processed foods (UPFs) risks life-shortening illnesses from heart disease and stroke to diabetes and cancer. Because these diseases are degenerative over time, the food and drink industry has been able to argue for decades that UPFs are fine in moderation. It would have us believe that there is no such thing as a "junk" individual food, only poor diets overall, and that its products therefore should not be subject to any restrictions.

Just as with climate breakdown and smoking, the science on harm caused by foods high in fat, salt and sugar is now settled, but the industry continues to deny and distract to delay action. Two weeks ago, a new report highlighted the lengths to which big food has gone to stop governments implementing policies that would tackle the global crisis of diet-related disease.

Since 2010, big food and its lobby groups have brought 235 lawsuits against governments. More than a third of cases where the plaintiff was identifiable were filed by top global brands, led by Coca-Cola, PepsiCo and Mondelēz. The cases add up to 595 years of litigation, according to the investigative group Lighthouse Reports, which has been monitoring the trend alongside academics, the Guardian and other media outlets.

The litigation strategy is cynical but effective. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director general of the World Health Organization, is damning. "Litigation has been used to oppose or weaken public health measures on obesity and unhealthy diets," he said. "These delays cost countries billions in healthcare and legal expenses and create a regulatory chill that deters governments from adopting vital protections."

Protections are much needed. Around the world more than 1 billion people live with obesity and a further 2 billion are overweight. In many countries, including the UK, US and Australia, UPFs have become staples, and make up half the average diet.

Hence the industry manoevres. Faced with mounting worldwide concern, it can no longer hold back the tide of evidence any more than fossil fuel or tobacco companies can, but like those sectors, it hopes to tie governments up for a few years more while it protects its profits, even if that takes us to a tipping point at which state health services are overwhelmed.

As with fossil fuels and tobacco, the problem is existential for the food industry. Although manufacturers say they are

ILLUSTRATION: ELEANOR SHAKESPEARE

* **Felicity Lawrence** *is the author of Not on the Label: What Really Goes Into the Food on Your Plate*

Big food firms are panicking. Their time may be running out

Felicity Lawrence

← *Continued from front*

making their food and drinks healthier, the bald truth is that the economic structure of the agrifood system means that is not possible in any real sense. Manufacturers of UPFs take cheap commodity crops, most often corn, soya and sugar cane and sugar beet, and break them down into their constituent parts. These crops are cheap because governments, especially in the US and EU, have long subsidised farmers, who are a powerful voting lobby, to produce surpluses of them. Farm subsidies and exports of food surplus have been a plank in US geopolitical strategy since the end of the second world war. Donald Trump in fact increased support to farmers in the US in his One Big Beautiful Bill Act in 2025.

Separated into processed parts – bulk oils, proteins, sugars, and starches – these cheap commodity crops are stripped of the fibre and many of the vitamins, minerals and other micronutrients we need for health. But they can be reconstituted as "added value" processed foods, with the help of flavouring, colouring and texturising additives to replace what has been lost, or sold as high-value animal feed for the world's ever-growing intensive livestock industry. Unlike minimally processed foods such as perishable fruits and vegetables, they don't go off.

My general rule of thumb, however, is that added shareholder value is in inverse proportion to human nutritional value. The arrival of anti-obesity drugs has seen the industry tacitly admit it. As people taking GLP-1 weight-loss drugs find their appetites shrinking, they are buying fewer UPFs. Retailers have developed "nutrient-dense" but calorie-light meals in response, for a premium, as if meals should be anything but nutrient dense as a matter of course.

The fact is we need to stop eating UPFs in any significant amount, just as we need to leave oil in the ground and give up smoking. The more the public realises that, the greater the industry's need to keep marketing to us and block government attempts to help us make better choices. It is no coincidence that the majority of lawsuits brought or threatened by the top food and drink companies occur in countries that have been in the vanguard of identifying the harm from UPFs, such as Brazil, or in restricting them, such as Mexico with its sugary drink taxes.

In the UK it was Kellogg's that sued the secretary of state for health in 2021 over plans to control promotions on foods high in fat, salt or sugar (HFSS), including many of its breakfast cereals. Its UK marketing company argued in the high court that the health secretary was acting beyond his powers and that such controls breached its rights under the Human Rights Act (by assault on its right to freedom of commercial expression and on its companies' "goodwill" monetary value). Tellingly, its lawyers cited case law involving British American Tobacco. They also pleaded that, although more than half of its breakfast cereals fell foul of the HFSS limits thanks to their ingredients, if you took into account the milk people ate with its products, they looked much healthier. Kellogg's lost its case, with the judge noting that mixing a high-sugar breakfast cereal with milk does not "alter the fact that it is high in sugar". But in losing, Kellogg's tied up considerable government time and resource.

It would be transformative if governments switched distorting agricultural subsidies away from corn, soya and sugar, crops that are also associated with ecological destruction. They could support local production of healthy fruit and vegetables instead. Negotiating global agreement seems overwhelmingly daunting, with individual states having few levers to pull.

But there is also a lesson here and it is that, as with so much policy, small battles patiently won do make a difference. Curbs on promotion – clearer labelling, no two-for-one offers, no end-of-aisle positioning – may seem small fry, but the fact that the industry and its lobbying groups choose to fight costly delaying litigation shows these incremental changes do have an effect. Manufacturers are right to see government action as a threat. It needs to be.

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NHS

Mental health should be a higher priority. New clinics are a hopeful sign

The rise in children and young people with mental health problems makes this week's announcement of a new network of community clinics in England particularly welcome. A&E departments have recorded an increase in difficult-to-manage symptoms including aggression and hallucinations. New specialist walk-in mental health services should take some of the pressure off. The bringing forward of a deadline for ending out-of-area acute placements, and a pledge to reduce waiting times for children, are also positive.

Declining mental health was among the key themes of Alan Milburn's interim report on young people and work. It is a big factor behind the rise in claims for illness and disability benefits. Children's anxiety and other psychological difficulties are also among the many challenges facing schools. Recent years have seen steep rises in emotionally based school avoidance, as well as in autism and neurodiversity.

But while concerns about mental health are shared across government, they have not been prominent in policies put forward by the department where you might expect them to feature most: health. Partly, that is due to other pressing issues including social care and enormous hospital waiting-lists. Partly, it is because ministers have been waiting for a review led by Prof Peter Fonagy into mental health conditions, ADHD and autism. Its recommendations are expected soon, and will feed into an upcoming strategy. In her first interview with the Guardian as health secretary, Yvette Cooper focused on maternity services and the need to prepare for future heatwaves. But the commitment to expand community mental health points to a welcome recognition that this should be an area of focus too.

Parity between mental and physical healthcare became a policy goal in 2011, with the launch of a No Health Without Mental Health initiative. Efforts to stress the importance of psychological wellbeing, and its interconnectedness with physical health, long predate that. The commitment made in last year's 10-year health strategy to shift resources gradually away from acute hospitals and towards community services would seem to dovetail with this balanced, holistic outlook. But one year on from its launch, experts including Siva Anandaciva, of the King's Fund, have raised doubts about "whether the NHS really will be committed to the fundamental shift away from hospital care that the health plan proposed". This week it was revealed that one mental health trust, in east London, is planning to make £230m of cuts. Mental health is not ringfenced within NHS budgets, and as a proportion of overall health spending fell from 9.0% of the total in 2023/24 to 8.78% in 2024/25.

The reasons for the lower priority placed on mental health, compared with physical diseases and injuries, are complex, and reflect cultural as well as structural factors to do with the way that the NHS is organised. Socioeconomic determinants of poor mental health including incomes, work and housing, are outside Ms Cooper's remit. But the disparities in access to treatment are irrational and unjust. Severe depression and anxiety are highly debilitating conditions. Expectations about waiting times and treatment options need to be clarified.

There are no easy fixes in a system as complicated as the NHS. It is not clear where the new neighbourhood centres fit in existing plans – or who will staff them. But providing that further details are produced in due course, the shift in focus that they signal should be supported.

Europe

The rise of a new far-right party in Italy confirms an ominous trend

When a serving Italian general published a far-right tract in 2023 entitled The World Turned Upside Down, a disciplinary inquiry swiftly followed. Roberto Vannacci's text was a sustained exercise in bile and bigotry, attacking among other things the "normalisation" of homosexuality, and questioning whether a high-profile black volleyball star could really be considered Italian. The controversy sent the book into the bestseller charts, and its author was suspended for bringing the army into disrepute.

A year out from Italy's next general election, Mr Vannacci is a problem not for the military but for the country's prime minister, Giorgia Meloni. Now a member of the European parliament, in February he exploited his notoriety to found National Future, a political party which argues that Ms Meloni's coalition government has sold out its far-right supporters through not being extreme enough. The "true right", according to the former paratrooper – who once served as a military attache in Moscow – should be pro-Putin and anti-Ukraine, anti-EU, and committed to restoring the "cultural homogeneity" of Italy through the expulsion of immigrants and their descendants.

Shockingly, polls are now placing National Future just behind Forza Italia, the second-biggest party in Ms Meloni's hard-right coalition, and ahead of its third main component, Matteo Salvini's League. For Ms Meloni, Mr Vannacci's rapid rise now threatens to become a major dilemma. To beat the combined forces of the left next year she may require the support of a party that does not disguise its sympathy with Italy's fascist past. But to seek it would give the lie to efforts to present her own Brothers of Italy party (which retains a neo-fascist political symbol in its logo) as part of the mainstream conservative tradition.

The rest of Europe should sit up and take notice of Mr Vannacci's rise. At a time when Russian influence on the far right is already a cause for concern, he has declared himself open to the idea of funding from Moscow and also Beijing. More broadly, the emergence of National Future confirms that as well as dragging mainstream politics towards more extreme positions on immigration, the continent's far right is itself radicalising.

Here, the equivalent can be found in Rupert Lowe's Restore Britain party, which has been exerting a rightwards gravitational pull on Reform UK. Poland's nationalist and Eurosceptic Law and Justice party has embarked on a similar trajectory, in order to compete with two newish and growing far-right parties. In Germany, Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) stands on the brink of a historic breakthrough in state elections in eastern Germany, and leads in national polls.

The ominous political consequences were on display last week in the panicked overreaction of leaders to the crisis in the Spanish exclave of Ceuta. With one eye over her right shoulder, Ms Meloni was at the forefront of divisive early calls for action to be taken against Spain following an incursion by irregular migrants. For his part, Mr Vannacci used the incident to amplify his calls for a Europe-wide "remigration" strategy.

Mr Vannacci's repugnant politics are beyond the pale. In Germany, the chancellor, Friedrich Merz, continues to rule out any form of national alliance with the AfD. Were Ms Meloni to countenance any form of accommodation with Italy's rogue general, it would demolish her fragile claims to mainstream respectability.

By day five of my labour, all I wanted was to survive

Natalie Morris

On the third day of being in labour with my first child, I entered a new state of being. It was time to dig deep. This is what I had learned in all the childbirth classes. As long as I remained calm, breathed as instructed, moaned through the pain, things would happen as they were meant to. My body knew what it was doing. Only, it didn't.

On the fourth day, I started to beg. This wasn't right. Despite contraction after relentless contraction, I wasn't dilating. I hadn't slept, I couldn't even sit down. I needed help. And still, they waited. For what, I never understood.

When Yvette Cooper told the Guardian this week that women must not "feel pressurised" to have "an ideal birth experience", it was a relief to hear her name this all-too-common phenomenon in which maternity staff are reluctant – or refusing – to escalate. But Cooper's characterisation of the problem is not the full picture. The harm here is not just in women being nudged towards a certain kind of birth experience, but in a culture that can completely override women's physical and psychological safety in favour of a low-intervention ideal.

Half of Britain's maternal deaths are considered preventable, and low-intervention births are the ideal for a reason. Midwife-led care usually results in better outcomes for healthy women with straightforward pregnancies – lower risk of infection and severe bleeds, and quicker recovery. In 2024-25, 45% of all hospital deliveries in England (542,235 total births) were performed via caesarean section – it was the first time C-sections outnumbered unassisted natural vaginal births. (Another 11% needed extra support through instruments such as forceps.) There is a natural, and warranted, cautiousness about the over-medicalisation of birth, which can lead to avoidable complications, and leave women who would prefer a natural birth feeling pressured to take a different route. But we can't ignore that there are also structural forces at play here: lower intervention also translates to lower cost for an overstretched, under-resourced system. One midwife told me explicitly that they would have admitted me to the labour ward earlier if there had been a bed.

Of course most first-time mothers would choose the lowest possible intervention if they could. I had hoped to float blissfully in a birthing pool under the soft glow of fairy lights. But when it comes to the messy, unpredictable, dangerous act of bringing new life into the world, the concept of choice can quickly be revealed as a fallacy. By day five of my labour, I was not thinking about my birth plan. I was not thinking about very much at all. My only focus was survival.

The demographic of people giving birth today looks nothing like it did 30 years ago. The average age of a mother in England and Wales is now 31, a figure that has been creeping up since records began. There is something deeply flawed about a system that pushes quite so strongly for low-intervention births despite the fact that mothers over 30 are more likely to require a higher level of medical involvement. Almost half of UK women aged 30-39 have caesareans, and for those over 40, it is now the most common way to give birth. Yet the narrative of an "ideal birth" persists, leaving women who end up needing more help wondering where they went wrong. Maternity practices must reflect this reality, or risk perpetuating a cycle that leaves women at risk and then pushes the blame back on to them.

After the best part of a week, I was eventually wheeled down for an emergency C-section. Even then, it wasn't the desperate pleas from my husband and me that finally spurred action, it was the fact that my baby started showing signs of distress. The doctors who greeted us displayed clear consternation that I had been left in that state for so long, a factor that probably played a part in my child developing an irregular heartbeat. The ideal birth narrative – that low-intervention, midwife-led care is always best – has hardened into institutional bias, amid a system in which women's choices about their medical care are too often sidelined.

In one of her first acts as health secretary, Cooper said she intends to reintroduce binding national maternity standards. They will include ending the postcode lottery for levels of care, and tackling inequalities that have meant worse outcomes for poorer and for black and Asian women. Her promises sound reassuring, but we have heard similar things before. What's needed is a fundamental shift so that women's voices are treated as clinical evidence, not background noise.

There is a deep-rooted disconnect in NHS maternity units. Between the needs of patients and the people treating them, and between different parts of the system itself. When midwife-led care and obstetric intervention are positioned in opposition, rather than as complementary approaches, escalation can be perceived as failure instead of necessary care. And in that gap, women at their most vulnerable have their pain minimised and their instincts questioned, sometimes to the point that risk becomes life-threatening.

Trauma is a brutal introduction to motherhood, and one that is all too common. For me and thousands of other mothers, our births could have gone so differently if we had only been heard. My ideal birth is not defined by candlelight or calm breathing. It is one where I am listened to, believed and responded to in time. One that both my baby and I survive at any cost.

Yvette Cooper's characterisation of the problem is not the full picture. The system is overriding women's safety

ILLUSTRATION: PA/ ALAMY/GETTY/ GUARDIAN DESIGN

* **Natalie Morris** *is the author of Mixed/Other: Explorations of Multiraciality in Modern Britain*

REBECCA HENDIN

I knew Rod Liddle. What did he become?

Zoe Williams

As tributes poured in for Rod Liddle, the Sunday Times and Sun columnist who has died at the age of 66, they were markedly coy and sanitised. Paradoxically, those were the exact deficiencies obituaries praised Liddle for avoiding – they said he shot from the hip and ruffled feathers, remorselessly attacked the liberal establishment and was ebullient. Michael Gove called him "special and brave". But brave in the face of what? Attacked the liberal establishment how?

This delicacy was particularly noticeable in a segment on Radio 4's Today programme, of which Liddle was editor in the 90s, between Justin Webb and Amol Rajan. "If there was a golden thread that connected the person you saw back then with the person of a few weeks ago," Webb said, "it was a distrust of authority." But Liddle's targets as a columnist were not the authorities. Often they were Muslims and immigrants, transgender people and chronic illness sufferers, African-Caribbean men from Harlesden. He did not attack the establishment, he attacked the marginalised, constantly.

There is sometimes a dilemma in how we process death. Decently, we seek not to speak ill of the dead, and certainly one hopes to never increase the grief of those who loved them. But does that mean we are also duty-bound not to discuss more uncomfortable issues? Here I feel the dilemma.

I was friends with Rod Liddle in the 90s. He was a different Rod then. The principal target of his satire was himself. He would lampoon guys having affairs, guys who were a shambles, guys who had run out of road. If there was any ethno-caricaturing, it read as a footnote to a worldview in which nobody was more ridiculous than he, Rod Liddle. This carried on into his collection of short stories, Too Beautiful for You (2003), in which the most memorable escapade was a man getting into a train crash, after seeing his mistress, rushing across a field carrying his severed arm so that he could get to a hospital without blowing his alibi, and realising as he bleeds out that he must actually really love his wife.

In 1983, he was a member of the Socialist Workers party and by 1990, a researcher for the Labour party, but what made him seem left-left, rather than centre left, didn't have a membership card. It was the self-parody coupled with an overall dishevelment that conveyed a deep-seated humanity and pluralism: "I'm a mess, you're a mess, let's get out of this mess together." I know that is maddeningly unspecific, but I also know that anyone on the left will get what I mean.

So his transformation into an attack dog for the race-baiting right was painful to watch, if not exactly unprecedented. On Tuesday, sociologist Will Davies characterised this post-68 type, "drawn to norm-breaching, moving via adolescent rebellion, punk, revolutionary socialism and eventually ending up at racism, because by the 21st century that was the most efficient transgression still on offer". The rightwing media will pay absolutely top dollar for a big-name left-to-right defector.

One of the last times I saw Liddle was a couple of months ago when we were both on Sky News. He looked really different, because he had COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease). I asked him how he was and he said "depressed", and I asked why, but I was just being tactful, because it was obvious why. My mum died with COPD last year, and by the time your face goes grey, life is pretty horrible, like drowning in air. "I'm no longer priapic," he replied.

I felt ineffably sad; that privately, his persona was still the same, standing there with his arm hanging off, insisting that the first thing he would do, once he got it sewed back on, was get a hard-on; sad at the pantomime of it, cartoon prejudices with real-life consequences, trotted out on command, funded by people with mountains of money who wish society ill; sad about the empathy and solidarity that had once built a collective firewall against hate-for-fun, which had been slowly extinguished.

In fact, I wanted to start crying but I'd just had my makeup done, so we went on air and argued about Andy Burnham in Makerfield, and he said he would only win it if he "sorted out" immigration. I won't miss Rod Liddle, but I miss the person he was when the world was different, and I miss that different world.

Established 1906

Country diary

Garstang, Lancashire

As I walked across the show field in the sunshine on my way to the secretary's tent, my shepherd's crook snapped in half. On closer inspection, it was riddled with woodworm – not the best start to a day of judging at the Garstang agricultural show. The event was first held in 1813, and it was an honour to be asked to judge the native sheep this year. I was smartly dressed in tweed and a fedora – and a stick that was hastily cobbled back together by one of the stewards with gaffer tape.

It is quite a job comparing different breeds, and I had spent the week beforehand learning what was desirable and what was considered a "fault" among upland breeds such as Clun Forest, Derbyshire Gritstone and Welsh Badger Face (Torduu and Torwen), and among lowland ones including Border Leicester, Coloured Ryeland and Wensleydale.

As an example, the Herdwick may not have large spots on its ears; other breeds may without it counting against them. Some breeds need to have black on the inside of their ears, some black only on the outside. As well as judging the breed standard, I was also looking for conformity within the group.

I carefully examined the mouth of each sheep. The ability to find and eat food for yourself is a key attribute in a sheep, so mouth quality is vital. I then examined the sheep's physical condition and fleece quality. Champion in the upland breeds was clear to my mind: a Welsh Torduu ewe bred by Andrew Clark, with a Clun Forest tup the reserve champion. In the lowland breeds, the Wensleydale ewe bred by Andrew Tattersall was champion, with a Border Leicester the reserve.

Away from the trophies and rosettes, it was good to see so many Wensleydales, with their lustrous shiny fleeces and distinctive corkscrew spirals. I asked one breeder why there aren't more people keeping Wensleydales. "It's because they are all about the wool," she said. People are moving away from breeds that are primarily bred for wool as so few garments are made from wool now, so most sheep are kept to breed for meat instead. Today, at least, the Wensleydales had their day in the sun.

Andrea Meanwell

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Catholic or not, many of us share the PM's beliefs

Julian Coman's article about Andy Burnham resonated with me, as I share his belief in compassion, social responsibility and concern for those who are struggling (Like Burnham, I was an altar boy. His Catholic upbringing is shaping the way he governs, theguardian.com, 1 August). Where I differ is in the suggestion that these values are rooted primarily in Catholicism.

I grew up in inner-city Manchester during the Thatcher years, in a low socioeconomic working-class community facing unemployment, poverty and drug misuse. My parents were not religious, but they instilled in me a humanist outlook based on empathy, fairness and our shared responsibilities to one another.

The same values were reinforced at my primary school. In a diverse inner-city neighbourhood, children from different backgrounds learned side by side. Looking back, religion barely featured in our day-to-day lives at school. Faith was generally considered a private matter. What united us was a simple understanding that everyone deserved respect, fairness and kindness. We learned to see one another not as representatives of different beliefs, but as fellow human beings with a shared stake in our community and society.

It was an inclusive environment that left me comfortable and confident in Britain as a diverse society. Through our families, teachers and local community, we came to appreciate the secular institutions that bound us together: the NHS, social housing and the welfare state. Children whose families had lived here for generations learned alongside those whose families had arrived more recently, but there was a shared understanding that these institutions represented something valuable, something to be respected, strengthened and improved. Civic responsibility, inclusivity and social justice were not religious lessons; they were human lessons.

Those values shaped me, too, but they came from a secular humanist upbringing, my community, and Britain's civic institutions. The compassion that Coman admires in Burnham may well have been strengthened by his Catholic upbringing, but compassion, solidarity and social responsibility are not the preserve of any one faith or worldview. If there is a moral tradition worth celebrating, it's the broader human one: the belief that we flourish not alone, but through our obligations to one another, regardless of faith.

Lorna Peters
Manchester

● Julian Coman's article was encouraging. The faith communities I know are all deeply involved in politics, justice, homelessness work and much more. At a recent local Labour party meeting, there were two Methodists (I was one), several Catholics and a couple of Quakers.

Coman mentions the Methodist worldview that Margaret Thatcher inherited from her father. But Mrs Thatcher didn't know her Methodist roots. Our founder, John Wesley, said: "The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness." So when she said "there is no such thing as society", she was denying her Methodist roots. Much worse, though, was that she was wrong and set in train the rise of individualism.

Rev Richard Parkes
Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire

● Julian Coman has it pretty much spot-on. "The problem with Christianity is that no one has ever really tried it," as my wise mother, Peggy Brown, always said.

While I continue to disappoint myself in that regard, perhaps Andy Burnham will succeed in being the first to preserve integrity and hope in the fire of political separatism and selfishness.

John Brown
Hartford, Cheshire

Early release exposes a failing penal system

There is something deeply incongruous about a penal system centred on incarceration having to release prisoners early because it has run out of room to incarcerate them (Rapists and groomers will not be freed early, says PM, 4 August).

The government's latest early-release measures may be necessary to prevent our prisons from becoming completely overwhelmed, but they are surely a symptom of a much deeper failure. We appear to be operating a revolving-door policy: tougher sentencing fills the prisons, overcrowding forces early release, public concern produces calls for tougher sentencing, and the cycle begins again. It is rather like baling water out of a sinking boat without ever fixing the hole.

The question we should be asking is not simply how many prisoners we can accommodate, but what imprisonment is actually intended to achieve. If the purpose is punishment, routinely cutting sentences undermines the principle. If it is public protection, we should concentrate prison places on those who pose the greatest risk. And if rehabilitation is the objective, we should question the wisdom of short custodial sentences when properly supervised community sentences can sometimes produce better outcomes.

Early release may therefore be an unavoidable short-term expedient. But it cannot sensibly become a permanent method of managing a prison system whose fundamental assumptions have never been properly examined.

Name and address supplied

● If the current early-release policy puts women at risk from violent men, and most women in prison have no history of violence, doesn't it follow that early release should be focused primarily on women prisoners? With a little reorganisation, and resources redirected towards mental health services, whole prisons could presumably be freed up.

Marcia Saunders
London

How private schools could help Afghan girls

Here is another plan for Gordon Brown (We cannot just stand by as the Taliban target women and girls, 4 August). In a very few years Afghanistan will have no female doctors, nurses or midwives. For the Taliban have not only stopped girls' education and codified child marriage, but have banned contraception and forbidden women and girls to access male health providers. Inevitably, there will be a huge increase in maternal and neonatal mortality.

One way the UK could help is by its well endowed independent girls schools offering A-level science bursaries to those Afghan girls who wish to study medicine, have learned English online and can show that they have the ability to follow such a course.

I have been corresponding with such a girl, now 15, who longs to become a doctor so she can care for her sisters. Even if passports, visas, travel, etc may be problematic, just offering such bursaries would be a way of keeping this gender apartheid in Afghanistan in the spotlight. Independent schools enjoy questionable charitable status. Here is a way of justifying it.

Margaret Owen
President, Widows for Peace Through Democracy

Corrections and clarifications

● **An article (Hackers steal personal details from DfE and police databases, 30 July, p4) said that "addresses" of people who contacted the Ask the Police service had been taken; this should have said email addresses.**

● **Yvette Cooper MP took maternity leave as a junior health minister in 2001, not the "early 90s" as an article said (Women must not feel pressure to have 'an ideal birth', says Cooper, 5 August, p2).**

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Words to staff the barricades against

As someone working in human resources who has spent years encouraging colleagues to use the word "staffing" rather than "manning", I find it ironic that in reviewing the TV series Furious, which is "powered [by] female rage" (1 August), Lucy Mangan wrote that its lead character Alice Black "is manning the FBI tip line".

Kathy Ashton
York

● Mark Lawson states that Jimmy Cricket's "retained native accent allowed him to rhyme 'faffing' with 'laughing'" (How Jimmy Cricket mastered pure fun, 5 August). As most of the UK's English speakers would say, these words do rhyme. It is only some from southern England and a few other areas who pronounce laughing incorrectly.

Gordon Glassford
Corby, Northamptonshire

● As Kemi Badenoch still supports Joshua Bonehill-Paine because he has been deradicalised (Badenoch makes former neo-Nazi a Tory adviser after he withdraws as candidate, 6 August), perhaps she'll now campaign to allow Shamima Begum to return to the UK.

Mary Hutty
Bath

● "Vertical drinking" is not the problem (Time at the bar? Council accused of trying to stop pubs being pubs with 'no standing' plan, 6 August). It is the inability to remain vertical while drinking that is where the trouble begins.

Austen Lynch
Garstang, Lancashire

● I will only accept a safety driver in a self-driving taxi if it is Ann Droid (London to get self-driving taxis in weeks – with safety driver, for now, 6 August).

Margaret Squires
St Andrews, Fife

Franco Baresi

Commanding Italian footballer and captain of AC Milan during a period of great success for the club

At a time when Italian football was known for the excellence of its defensive systems, Franco Baresi, who has died aged 66 after a period of ill health, embodied its most prized qualities. Whether with AC Milan, his only club during his long career, or Italy, with whom he reached the 1994 World Cup final, he was a stylish, unflappable and commanding presence, primus inter pares alongside distinguished colleagues.

Captaining Milan for 15 of his 20 seasons at San Siro, he won the European Cup twice and the Serie A championship six times, a key figure alongside such glittering names as Gianni Rivera, Ruud Gullit, Paolo Maldini, Marco van Basten, Carlo Ancelotti and George Weah. With his fellow centre-back Alessandro Costacurta, the right-back Mauro Tassotti and Maldini at left-back, he formed a legendary defensive line.

Unusually for a defender, he was runner-up in the contest for the 1989 Ballon d'Or, the contest organised by the magazine France Football to determine the year's most outstanding player. To the England midfielder Ray Wilkins, who joined Milan from Manchester United in 1984 and stayed there for three seasons, he was simply "the best I ever played with".

Technically assured, he was noted for the confidence with which he carried the ball out of defence before sending a penetrating pass to a more advanced colleague. Although standing only 5ft 10in, his timing made him effective in the air and he was every bit as physically hard as he needed to be in the Italian football of that era.

Baresi holding off Romario of Brazil, during the World Cup final in Los Angeles, 1994
ACTION IMAGES/ REUTERS

Born on a farm in Travagliato, a town near Brescia in northern Italy, he grew up playing football with his brother, Giuseppe, who was two years older. Their mother, Regina, died of an illness in 1973 when Franco was 13. Their father, Terzo, died in a road accident four years later.

Football became the boys' family. Giuseppe, also a defender, had joined Internazionale, Milan's other big club, in 1971, captaining the side and winning 18 international caps. When the club declined to take on the younger brother as well, describing him as "too frail", Franco joined AC Milan, who shared a stadium with Inter. On many occasions over the next 20 years, when the Rossoneri (Milan) met the Nerazzurri (Inter), the Baresi brothers would find themselves in the centre circle before the kick-off, rival captains shaking hands and tossing a coin.

The younger one made his debut for Milan on 23 April 1978, two weeks before his 18th birthday, in a 2-1 victory at Verona. The following season Milan won the league championship, with the teenaged Baresi appearing in all 30 fixtures under the great Swedish coach Nils Liedholm.

In 1980, however, after Liedholm's departure, the team was implicated in a match-fixing scandal and relegated to Serie B. Promoted back to the top flight at the first attempt, they were relegated again the next season after finishing third from bottom. With the 22-year-old Baresi installed as captain, again they made short work of regaining their Serie A status, this time consolidating their position.

> **He was every bit as physically hard as he needed to be in the Italian football of that era**

He made his international debut in 1984 but was then omitted by the national coach, Enzo Bearzot, from the 1986 World Cup squad. That was the year that the arrival of the media magnate Silvio Berlusconi as Milan's owner and president galvanised the club and began an era of unprecedented success.

At a time when clubs were allowed only three foreign players, the new president brought in a trio of brilliant Dutchmen: Gullit, Van Basten and Frank Rijkaard. With the defence now firmly established around Baresi, the captain led them to the 1987-88 league title and then, in 1989, to a glorious 4-0 victory over Steaua Bucharest in the European Cup final.

Further honours flooded in: the Intercontinental Cup in 1989 and 1990, the Serie A title four more times between 1991 and 1996, and the European Cup again in 1990, beating Benfica 1-0 in Vienna.

When Italy hosted the World Cup in 1990, Baresi played every game. The defence kept a clean sheet for 518 minutes, a tournament record, until conceding in the semi-final to Argentina, who beat them in the penalty shootout.

In 1994, at the height of his eminence, Baresi had probably the two most bitter-sweet moments of his career. Having guided Milan to another European Cup final, he was kept by a suspension out of the contest with Barcelona, which the Italian side won 4-0. A few weeks later he was captaining Italy in the World Cup final against Brazil, only to miss a penalty in the shootout after a goalless 120 minutes. When Roberto Baggio also missed from the spot, Brazil were crowned world champions.

Baresi retired from international football after one more game, his 81st for the Azzurri, passing the captain's armband to Maldini. He played his last game for Milan at the end of the 1996-97 season. He had represented the club 752 times in total, scoring 31 goals.

An appointment as director of football at Fulham in 2002 lasted only a few months, after which he spent several years coaching Milan's junior teams until retiring in 2008. Last year he underwent surgery to remove a lung nodule, and had been prescribed immunotherapy by a cancer specialist.

He is survived by his wife, Maura (nee Lari), whom he married in 1984, and their sons, Edoardo and Giannandrea, and by Giuseppe.
Richard Williams

Franco (Franchino) Baresi, footballer, born 8 May 1960; died 31 July 2026

obituaries@theguardian.com

Jimmy Cricket

Northern Irish comedian known for his daft jokes and innocent demeanour

"I'm sorry I'm late – I couldn't find the M6 motorway … I had to go up the M3 twice," was a line typical of the comedian Jimmy Cricket, who has died aged 80. He became a household name in the 1980s thanks to his barrage of daft jokes, catchphrase of "And there's more!", and unmistakable outfit – floppy bowler hat, tattered evening dress, fingerless gloves and welly boots with the R and L on the wrong side.

With a cherubic, beaming face and innocent demeanour, he was an old-fashioned clown, gazing around on stage as if he might find the answer to life's imponderables in the wings. He was also a singular combination: a madcap humorist with clean material; an uncynical, abstemious family man of deep personal faith who succeeded in a sometimes coarse trade.

His act was not merely silly wordplay though; he juggled, did prop gags and threw in whole-hearted physicality when required. And he could disarm the toughest audience, gesturing at them to "come 'ere" as he delivered his jokes with conspiratorial bonhomie. His comedy had no victim and no agenda bar the joy of making people laugh.

In his heyday he was rarely off the nation's television sets, performing at the Royal Variety Performance in 1984 and seven times at the Children's Royal Variety Performance (1983-93). He headlined his own ITV show, And There's More (1985-88), which ran for four series, a tally matched by his 1990s BBC Radio 2 series Jimmy's Cricket Team.

He was born in Cookstown, County Tyrone, in Northern Ireland, the last of six children of Philomena (nee Conlon) and Frank Mulgrew. Frank was an undertaker, publican, taxi driver and part-time auctioneer; after his death in 1953, Philomena took on various jobs to make ends meet, including working at a Lucozade factory.

Jimmy left St Patrick's college, Bearnageeha, in Belfast, aged 15 with no qualifications but aware that, as the classroom clown, he could make people laugh. He undertook odd jobs – supermarket delivery boy, labourer, betting shop cashier – while entering talent shows doing comical dances or miming to pop songs.

In 1966, having performed standup with some success around the local clubs, he became a redcoat at Butlin's holiday camp in Mosney, County Meath: it was a perfect environment for him, engaging in friendly chit-chat with holidaymakers, organising games, honing his craft on stage and learning from experienced comics.

The next decade was spent at camps around the UK, either at Butlin's or Pontins, mixing jobs out-of-season with gigs on the northern comedy circuit. While the gags were sometimes old and pilfered (a common practice then), he honed his persona until it was unique, adopting a stage name inspired by Jiminy Cricket from Walt Disney's Pinocchio.

His TV breakthrough came in 1980 when he was runner-up in LWT's Search for a Star. He didn't look back, appearing in Crackerjack! (1982), Blankety Blank (1985) and The Generation Game (1996). He felt the skewwhiff costume provided by the BBC for his appearance on The Good Old Days (1981) suited his act so well that he bought it and wore it thereafter. By 1983 he was able to turn down a Blackpool season in favour of his own sell-out shows.

Come the 21st century, when comics like Jimmy were deemed outdated by TV producers, he was still busy with live work. His humour being multigenerational in appeal, he was also perfect for pantomime, and played a variety of roles – from Buttons to Muddles to Baron Hardup – over the decades.

Latterly he was embraced by the next generation of comics, featuring on Peter Kay's (I'm Gonna Be) 500 Miles Comic Relief video (2007) and John Bishop's Only Joking TV show (2013). No dinosaur, he supported new talent, and played alternative comedy venues with the same enthusiasm as he did the clubs and cruise ships.

In 2012 he and another stalwart, Mick Miller, took a show to the Edinburgh fringe, proving that their hard-wrought stagecraft could work with modern audiences. Cricket was, according to one critic, "disarming charm personified".

He was awarded a papal knighthood by Pope Francis in 2015 for his services to charity – Cricket, who made his home in Rochdale, put on shows to raise funds for Francis House children's hospice in Manchester, and a portion of the profit from his 2023 autobiography, Come 'ere There's More, went to a child poverty charity, Mary's Meals.

He was fully booked for 2026 and had a joke book planned for Christmas, but was recently taken ill and ultimately unable to heed his own advice: "If you want to live longer, find out where you're going to die and stay away from there."

While working at Pontins, Morecambe, in 1972 he met May Tweedie, a waitress who also had a singing act with her sisters, and they married in 1974.

She survives him, as do their children, Dale, Frankie, Jamie and Katie – who is also a comedian – and four grandchildren.

Toby Hadoke

Jimmy Cricket (James Joseph Mulgrew), comedian, born 17 October 1945; died 3 August 2026

Cricket on stage at the Children's Royal Variety Performance at the Dominion theatre, London, 1990
REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

> **His comedy had no victim and no agenda bar the joy of making people laugh**

Birthdays

David Abraham, former chief executive, Channel 4, 63; **Bruce Dickinson**, singer, songwriter and airline pilot, 68; **Greg Chappell**, cricketer, 78; **Brian Conley**, actor, comedian and singer, 65; **Dominic Cork**, cricketer and commentator, 55; **David Duchovny**, actor, 66; **Lauren Hemp**, footballer, 26; **Kristin Hersh**, singer and songwriter, 60; **Harry Hyman**, businessman and founder of the International Opera awards, 70; **Garrison Keillor**, writer, 84; **Zane Lowe**, radio DJ and presenter, 53; **Doon Mackichan**, actor and comedian, 64; **Dame Sarah MacIntosh**, diplomat and permanent representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations, 57; **Seema Malhotra**, Labour Co-op MP and former minister, 54; **Huey Morgan**, musician and broadcaster, 58; **Lindsay Nicholson**, former editor-in-chief, Good Housekeeping magazine, 70; **Matthew Parris**, journalist and broadcaster, 77; **Alain Robert**, urban climber, 64; **Charlotte Ronson**, fashion designer, 49; **Nick Ross**, broadcaster, 79; **Alexei Sayle**, actor, comedian and writer, 74; **Michael Shannon**, actor, 52; **Sir Richard Sykes**, microbiologist, 84; **Charlize Theron**, actor, 51; **Jimmy Wales**, co-founder, Wikipedia, 60.

The actor and comedian Doon Mackichan, of Smack the Pony and Two Doors Down, pictured in 2024. She is 64 today

Announcements

Deaths

BOWER, Anne Shirley. Died at Moorgate Lodge nursing home, Rotherham 12 July 2026, aged 80. Former teacher at Oakwood School, Rotherham, Guardian reader and Labour Party member. Beloved wife of Harry, mum of Caroline and Jonathan, mother-in-law of David and Michelle, devoted grandma of Dan, Adam, Emily, Laura and Lydia. A celebration of Anne's life will be held on Friday 4 September at 1pm in Whiston Manorial Barn, Chaff Lane, Whiston, Rotherham S60 4HE.

HARTWIG, Dr Mervyn. 1 September 1937 to 30 July 2026. Died in London following a sudden stroke and pneumonia. Australian historian and founding editor of the Journal of Critical Realism, whose work made a significant contribution to the international critical realism movement. Much-loved husband of Rachel Sharp, father of Liz and David, stepfather, grandfather, colleague and friend to many. A private family cremation will take place. A celebration of Mervyn's life will be held separately.

For Announcements, Acknowledgments, Adoptions, Anniversaries, Birthdays, Births, Deaths, Engagements, Memorial Services and In Memoriam, email us at announcements@theguardian.com including your name, address and telephone number or phone 0203 353 2114.

Yesterday's solutions

Killer sudoku
Easy

7	6	2	1	3	8	4	9	5
4	3	1	5	2	9	7	8	6
5	9	8	4	6	7	3	1	2
8	4	6	3	9	1	2	5	7
9	2	5	7	4	6	1	3	8
1	7	3	2	8	5	9	6	4
2	1	7	6	5	3	8	4	9
3	5	9	8	7	4	6	2	1
6	8	4	9	1	2	5	7	3

Medium

4	5	3	7	2	9	1	6	8
9	6	2	3	1	8	5	7	4
1	8	7	6	5	4	9	3	2
7	1	4	9	6	5	2	8	3
5	2	6	8	7	3	4	9	1
3	9	8	2	4	1	7	5	6
8	4	5	1	3	7	6	2	9
6	7	9	4	8	2	3	1	5
2	3	1	5	9	6	8	4	7

Codeword

A	B	U	T	■	W	■	J	■	U	R	G	E
■	O	■	O	P	I	N	I	O	N	■	U	■
T	A	C	T	■	D	■	L	■	R	E	A	D
U	■	O	■	B	E	E	T	L	E	■	V	■
B	O	O	■	R	■	■	■	■	Q	U	A	Y
■	Z	■	T	A	B	L	E	A	U	■	■	■
R	O	A	R	■	A	■	Q	■	I	D	L	Y
■	N	■	A	S	S	A	U	L	T	■	A	■
H	E	W	N	■	T	■	I	■	E	A	R	N
■	■	■	S	T	E	E	P	E	D	■	V	■
T	A	X	I	■	■	■	■	B	■	P	A	N
■	B	■	S	C	A	R	A	B	■	R	■	O
L	O	U	T	■	K	■	J	■	F	O	O	D
■	V	■	O	R	I	G	A	M	I	■	W	■
J	E	E	R	■	N	■	R	■	G	I	L	D

Cryptic crossword
Solution No. 30,078

■	L	A	S	U	■	C	S	■	G	■
K	I	N	G	S	T	O	N	■	O	P	E	R	A	■
■	S	■	A	■	U	K	■	V	■	C	■	W	■	■
S	T	A	R	■	M	O	N	T	E	G	O	B	A	Y
■	E	■	■	P	■	O	■	R	■	N	■	I	■	■
T	R	O	P	H	Y	■	W	E	L	L	D	O	N	E
■	I	■	L	■	■	■	N	■	E	■	B	■	■	■
J	A	M	A	I	C	A	■	S	T	R	E	W	T	H
■	■	S	■	H	■	C	■	■	■	S	■	R	■	■
S	A	L	T	F	I	S	H	■	P	A	T	O	I	S
■	B	■	I	■	P	■	U	■	E	■	■	F	■	■
M	A	T	C	H	M	A	K	E	R	■	B	O	L	T
■	C	■	B	■	U	■	K	■	U	■	E	■	I	■
■	U	S	A	I	N	■	A	C	K	E	E	A	N	D
■	S	■	G	■	K	■	S	■	E	■	F	■	G	■

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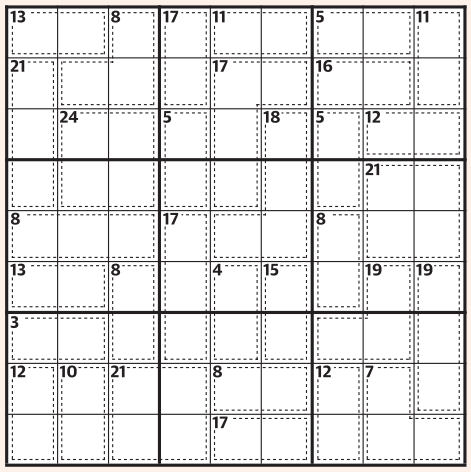
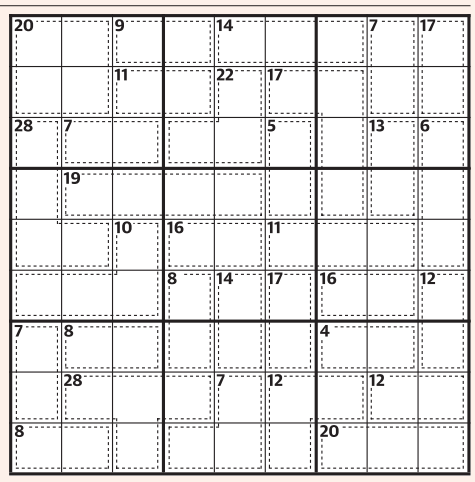
Killer sudoku

Easy

The normal rules of sudoku apply: fill each row, column and 3x3 box with all the numbers from 1 to 9. In addition, the digits in each inner shape (marked by dots) must add up to the number in the top corner of that box. No digit can be repeated within an inner shape.



Medium



Codeword

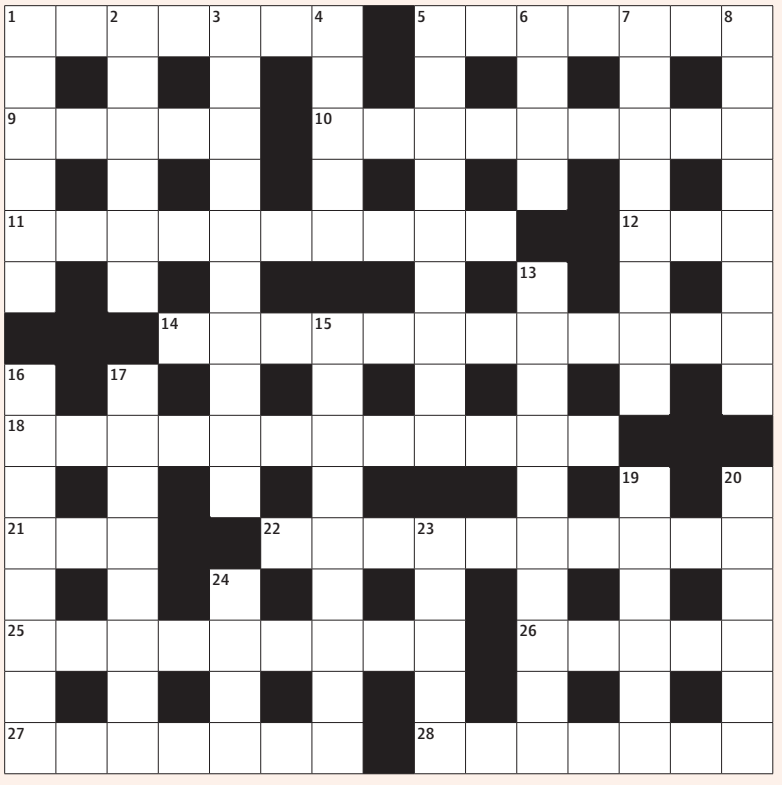
Each letter of the alphabet makes at least one appearance in the grid, and is represented by the same number wherever it appears. The letters decoded should help you to identify other letters and words in the grid.

■	12	■	5	■	10	■	22	■	25	■	24	■
12	2	3	2	2	6	■	7	19	18	19	6 R	16
■	6	■	6	■	16	■	2	■	20	■	25	■
10	6	2	4	20	5	25	24	■	25	18	2	23
■	2	■	■	■	10	■	4	■	24	■	23	■
21	26	26	19	6	■	23	2	10	4	14	25	25
■	17	■	12	■	26	■	10	■	10	■	24	■
■	■	8	4	10	6	4	21	7	4	26	■	■
■	5	■	1	■	21	■	6	■	21	■	15	■
6	21	22	19 U	4	5	15	■	19	14	4	21	14
■	19	■	4	■	5	■	25	■	■	■	8	■
20	7	21	10	■	21	12	13	25	26	10	25	24
■	9	■	21	■	8	■	25	■	19	■	6	■
9	19	10	19	6	25	■	26	21	12	11	25	12
■	7	■	5	■	6	■	10	■	25	■	24	■

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

1	2	3	4	5	6 R	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19 U	20	21	22	23	24	25	26

Guardian cryptic crossword No 30,079 set by Fed



Across

1 Advantage of computerised identikit picture when pursuing crook virtually (7)
5 Spotted predator - shark is caught (7)
9 Young male nurse is loaded (5)
10 Tea, cream - not full fat - oddly it's a Cambodian delicacy (9)
11 Call Musk with Washington opening that ought to bear fruit (10)
12 Two Americans holding back on driving range (3)
14 Pop singer's ill - lie about swallowing pill in trashed Ibis hotel (6,6)
18 TV star barking cruelly at crew (6.6)
21 Bow and scrape while retreating to some extent (3)
22 Hunk needing reason to start op-ed? (5,5)
25 Corrupt state maybe does if cutting back (9)
26 Initially in sonatas, Liszt enjoyed this minor key (5)
27 Expensive - taking 150 Euros, say (7)
28 In bed, weary, drinking wine - quite the opposite (7)

Down

1 On vacation Bradley Walsh ultimately ignored resort's in-house rules? (6)
2 Finally - given you identified graffiti artist - Banksy's in exposed state (6)
3 In France and in Germany, shaver sounded 1 across? (4-6)
4 Tax article without it (5)
5 My friend entertains men with essentially new material (9)
6 Ages in prison's manure shed (4)
7 A film star cycles and waves (8)
8 Pine nut's beginning to be problem (8)
13 School paid to spin results in mock (10)
15 Conducted lessons in English, with students covering tenses - one might appear with a smile (5,4)
16 Leaves power drills on the counter, securely fastened (8)
17 Sedative not applicable on piercing in the middle of the ear (8)
19 Stock of wine merchant delivered (6)
20 Gossipy magazine journalist is excited (6)
23 Lowest point of brain drain with regular emigration climbing (5)
24 Excellent, for example, to be Morocco-bound (4)

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Music
Films

Friday 7 August 2026

‘I want to escape the modern era’

Dominic Sessa

on risk, rebellion ... and playing bad-boy chef Anthony Bourdain

The Guardian

The Womack Sisters
Soul’s first family returns
page 4

RANKED!

River Phoenix's best films

As Stand By Me is re-released for its 40th anniversary, we look back on the late actor's finest movie roles, from a goofball boffin to a narcoleptic hustler

Ryan Gilbey

See the full list at theguardian.com/film

10 I Love You to Death *(1990)*

Wacky comedy about a wronged wife (Tracey Ullman) plotting to murder her philandering husband. She is assisted by her mother (Joan Plowright), an earnest hippy (Phoenix), whom the couple employ at their pizza joint, and stoned hit-men (William Hurt and Keanu Reeves). Phoenix denied that his character, with his crystals, beads and mysticism, bore any resemblance to himself ("Nope, no similarities whatsoever").

9 Sneakers *(1992)*

Phoenix and Sidney Poitier, previously paired in Little Nikita, team up for this spy adventure as part of an eccentric tech team headed by Robert Redford. The rest of the crew includes David Strathairn and Dan Aykroyd, who in one scene wears a T-shirt advertising Aleka's Attic, the folk-pop band fronted by Phoenix.

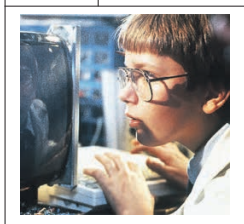
8 A Night in the Life of Jimmy Reardon *(1988)*

Phoenix was a reluctant heartthrob, so it follows that his one bona fide teen movie would be unorthodox and melancholy. As Jimmy, a slick, priapic but troubled young poet whose sexual partners include one of his mother's friends, Phoenix flirts with the dislikable and unsympathetic. In one scene, he loses interest during his girlfriend's elaborate masked-intruder sex fantasy: "I don't feel like Jack the Ripper today."

7 Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade *(1989)*

The most delirious part of this threequel is its breakneck, origin-story prologue, with Phoenix (who was recommended for the role by his Mosquito Coast co-star Harrison Ford) showing how the young Indiana Jones acquired his bullwhip, battered fedora, chin scar and ophidiophobia. It's such a hoot, only a spoilsport would ask why a strictly parented Boy Scout in 1912 Utah sports the surfer-dude fringe of a 1980s teen idol.

6 Explorers *(1985)*



Joe Dante used his Gremlins clout to make this charming goofball fantasy starring Phoenix and Ethan Hawke, both 14, as friends who build and pilot a rinky-dink spaceship. Making his movie debut, Phoenix was already on course to be a teen pin-up, but was cast against type as the boffin Wolfgang.

5 The Mosquito Coast *(1986)*

Peter Weir's dogged, Paul Schrader-scripted adaptation of Paul Theroux's novel about a ranting, idealistic inventor who drags his family off to live in the Central American rainforest is dominated by Harrison Ford's oppressive performance. The rest of the cast, including Helen Mirren as his wife, scarcely get a look-in. Phoenix's then-girlfriend, Martha Plimpton, has a memorable scene in which she speaks for his thousands of teenage fans by admitting: "I think of you when I go to the bathroom."

1 My Own Private Idaho *(1991)*

The boldness of Phoenix and Keanu Reeves in playing sex workers should not be underestimated. But the narcoleptic hustler Mike, who turns tricks while searching for his mother, was no ordinary job for Phoenix. The campfire confession in which Mike admits his feelings for Scott (Reeves) shows him controlling his character's destiny. Writer-director Gus Van Sant's innovative touches are cunning and cool, but it's Phoenix's performance, from his opening orgasm to his final collapse on a deserted country road, that gives the movie its heart and kick.

2 Running on Empty *(1988)*

Phoenix received his only Oscar nomination for this film about former radicals (Christine Lahti and Judd Hirsch) wanted by the FBI for their involvement in a bombing. He plays their eldest son, a piano prodigy who falls for his music teacher's daughter (Plimpton). Under the direction of Sidney Lumet, who declared Phoenix "couldn't be ordinary if he tried", the actor is achingly sad and true as the boy shouldering his parents' burdens.

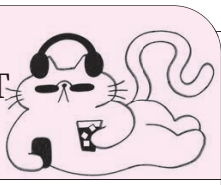
3 Stand by Me *(1986)*

As the most complex of the friends who trek into the woods to find a corpse in Rob Reiner's film of Stephen King's novella, Phoenix vividly evokes the boy's tensions. Each of his three greatest films gives him a killer final shot that has gained in poignancy since his death, but it's his farewell here that hits the hardest.

4 Dogfight *(1991)*

Hot from his Oscar nomination for Running on Empty, Phoenix was granted director approval for this drama about a group of callous young Marines competing in a "dogfight". He wisely chose the film-maker Nancy Savoca, who brings a complex tenderness to the emotional tussles between Eddie (Phoenix) and his prey, the shy waitress and amateur balladeer Rose (Lili Taylor), who turns out to be nobody's fool.

ADD TO PLAYLIST



The week's best new tracks

Coco and Clair Clair
One One

Let your skin prickle to this Atlanta, Georgia duo's addictive, pitying dismissal of an ungrateful ex, as menace encroaches on their minimalist, stumbling percussion.

Helen
Dead Shark II

Eleven years after Helen's debut, Liz Harris (AKA Grouper) unexpectedly reforms her dream-pop band. Dead Shark II is as good as the genre gets.

Lancer
2Late

After his emotional rap tracks Cry and Southpaw this year, the UK vocalist switches to singing for his synthwave-ballad debut for XL, restless and upset in the wake of a breakup.

Black Bananas
Eddie's Album

The side project from Royal Trux's raw-voiced vocalist, Jennifer Herrema, is back and on supremely fun form, flexing taut disco-funk behind murky lo-fi chillwave production.

Eden Aurelius
Entre Nous

The NYC producer's beautiful new album of ambient compositions and featherlight dub techno has a milky-sun blend of warm and cool, though its title track adds a touch more heat.

Hana Stretton
From

The lo-fi intimacy and the British-Australian songwriter's heavy, layered vocals suggest peeping under the bed and finding a tiny choir lying in wait.

New Radicals
One Night Only (Break Loose Break Free!)

The first NR song since 1999 is cause for celebration, with Gregg Alexander's knack for secular affirmations designed to lure hangdogs out of their holes.

By Ben Beaumont-Thomas and Laura Snapes

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH: BENEDICT EVANS/THE GUARDIAN
THIS PAGE: MOVIESTORE COLLECTION/REX

THE READER INTERVIEW

‘I had to make music after cracking my skull open’

PHOTOGRAPH: PETER MELLEKAS

Throwing Muses’ Kristin Hersh on Buddhist time travel, duetting with Michael Stipe and being inspired by Violent Femmes

As told to Priya Elan

Do you think Throwing Muses would have sounded different were it not for your bicycle accident? [Hersh was struck by a car when she was 16, resulting in a concussion that changed the way she heard sound.] *Bhafc99*

Yes. I think people might have liked us more, but we would have been more forgettable. Our songs were not very marketable. They came from a place of such utter honesty that it was difficult for us to become a band with an image, ambition or direction, which plays well on a human level, but not on a corporate one. Some people hate our music; they can’t deal with it because it’s triggering [emotionally], which I get. I was compelled to make music after cracking my skull open and then my life was very upsetting. But at the same time, I had real listeners. If you happen to come across a song that resonates with you, then it’s yours – you can ignore the musician who played it, because they were just the messenger.

Your guitar sound and playing is so distinctive, creative and superb – do you have an influence or hero who has inspired or guided you? *Goonergeof*

No, nobody. We started the Muses when I was 11, so I didn’t have time to invent a sonic vocabulary. I wish my music could be that palatable. I think there’s a place where music can touch people and not be off-putting, but I couldn’t engage in that way. But I babysat for this music critic and, every time I put his kids to bed, I was allowed to sit in his office and listen to records that hadn’t been released. One was the Violent Femmes’ first album [in 1983]. I remember the music critic told me that the boy in the band was “the male me” and I admit when I heard it I was like: “He’s right!” They had this simple, percussive and raw sound that was very effective.

I supported you in Dublin in 2001 and you said I reminded you of Frank Black. Have you seen Frank lately? *PaulOReilly*

The first time I heard the Pixies was when we were in soundcheck. A painter friend was at the bar and he said: “You should listen to this band,” which I would never normally do. I thought Charles [Thompson, AKA Frank Black] was a woman at first. I thought she was so cool – she had a shaved head and was singing about her dick. I was like: “She rocks!” But I forgave him for not being a girl and then I said: “I’m never letting go of you. You’re playing all of our shows with us, and here’s my manager, and here’s my label, and you’re coming on tour, and we’re gonna make all of this happen.” I did it for selfish reasons, because I wanted to hear them the whole time and I didn’t want to be alone any more.

What was the inspiration behind the song Counting Backwards? *_Tiana_*

Time-tripping! I was raised Buddhist by hippy parents and I never thought I was made for letting go of the past, which any therapist will tell you is really unhealthy! But I felt very strongly that I could alter the present by altering the past in a dream state. And that it has to be done with kindness.

‘I thought Frank Black was a woman at first. I was like: she rocks!’

Any chance of you working with [her stepsister and Throwing Muses co-founder] Tanya Donelly again? *ChrisOwens*

Yes – she was on tour with us a couple of years ago. She sang on the second self-titled Muses record [2003]. And my son Ryder just stayed at her house when he flew into Boston. All doors are open: anybody who is in the musical moment with me is allowed in, but it’s a big ask. No one’s ever left the Throwing Muses, it’s more like: “You feel like playing? OK, let’s do it!”

You’ve been prolific over the past decade. Is it safe to assume your EMDR treatment is over? [Eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing is a psychotherapy technique that Hersh used to treat post-traumatic stress disorder and a dissociative disorder.] *JosephKyle*

My life has been so very difficult; my whole system was just confused. I reacted to the real [PTSD] triggers by passing out, vomiting and screaming. My band members knew to protect me from my triggers, but that’s hard in life. Thanks to EMDR, I can still play music, which I didn’t think I would be able to. But I wouldn’t recommend it for everyone. EMDR is like psychological chemo. I would collapse every time I did it. And then you can’t stop it – it’s like a snowballing process, where all the pain you dissociated from comes back to you at once.

Send us your questions for next week’s interviewee theguardian.com/culture

Your upcoming album, Sugar on Blackstone, has such an evocative title. Where did it come from? *VerulamiumParkRanger*

Making this album, I was back in my home town of Providence, Rhode Island, living on a street called Hope. It’s off a street called Blackstone, which has this intense path on it that’s like this ship of lost souls. So I had “Hope” on the one side and the ship of lost souls on the other. These songs are autobiographical. They are very old stories from childhood. Dark Eyed Junco is about me and my little brother, how we were scared to go home because our stepfather was there. So we just played basketball until we couldn’t any more. The song is about how the feel of the basketball is more important than getting it in the hoop. I don’t even want to aim for the hoop.

Your Ghost [from her debut solo album, featuring REM’s Michael Stipe] is one of the most gorgeous songs I have ever heard – two unique voices coming together on such a haunting duet. Was it written with Michael Stipe in mind and are you still in contact? *Frou1967*

I wasn’t ever going to have a solo career; I wasn’t interested. But I had to get off Warner Brothers and breaking up the band wasn’t going to work. [In order to fulfil the recording contract, she was required to make another album.] I had this tape of leftover acoustic songs and Michael Stipe picked it up. He called me up and said: “I love this tape.” He knew I was going to fuck up the recording of it because I didn’t care. He called the studio as I was having trouble recording Your Ghost and I realised I needed his voice on it. Not too long ago, I was in New York playing a solo show and he was in the audience and I didn’t know. When I was playing Your Ghost, apparently he was in the back singing his parts and freaking out all the people around him.

Sugar on Blackstone is released on 18 September via Fire

‘We were taught by professionals!’

Music is in their DNA – but it took a stint driving Ubers to make the Womack Sisters realise they had to carry on a great soul dynasty

Alexis Petridis

‘There is a lot of relationship drama in our family’ … the Womack Sisters

Backstage at a London festival, on a Sunday afternoon, the Womack Sisters are assembling themselves on a sofa, still clad in the clothes they were wearing on stage a few minutes ago. They look very stylish in their black dresses, tights and high heels, but they are not, it has to be said, dressed appropriately for the weather, which is sweltering. “You don’t feel anything on stage,” says Zeimani with a shrug. “You just feel amazing, like you’re floating.”

“And we’re committed,” nods her sister BG. “You know, we were taught by *professionals*.”

Indeed they were. BG, Zeimani and Kucha Womack’s father was Cecil Womack: he wrote Teddy Pendergrass’s classic Love TKO, as well as hits for the O’Jays, the Four Tops and Patti LaBelle, and was one half of Womack and Womack, of Love Wars and Teardrops fame. The other half was their mother, Linda Womack, the daughter of “king of soul” Sam Cooke. Their uncle was Bobby Womack, who initially performed with Cecil in early-60s band the Valentinos before going on to record a string of classics that earned him the unofficial soubriquet The Greatest Soul Singer in the World: from Across 110th Street to If You Think You’re Lonely Now to the triumphant final album he made before his death in 2014, The Bravest Man in the Universe. Their half-brother’s mum, meanwhile, was Mary “My Guy” Wells.

Given their heritage, Zeimani says her father thought a career in anything other than music was a waste of time: when she approached him with the idea that she might go to medical school, he reacted with something approaching horror. “He said: ‘Just go in the studio and make music.’ I told him I needed to have a Plan B. He was like: ‘Plan B? Do Plan A, go hard, get on it.’”

In fairness, the Womack Sisters had long been apprenticed in the family business. They had spent their childhood travelling the world with their parents: Compass Point Studios in the Bahamas or Bob Marley’s studio in Jamaica; homes in Bangkok, Phuket, Johannesburg, London and, slightly less glamorously, Southend-on-Sea. Zeimani made her first public appearance as a baby, in her mother’s arms on the cover of Womack and Womack’s Conscience, the 1988 album featuring Teardrops. The sisters made their recording debut, alongside their four other siblings, on the 1993 album Transformation to the House of Zekkariyas. “We opened their shows,” remembers Zeimani. “And it was the start of us realising that we could be a group.”

But still, she says, “we didn’t take our dad’s advice”. They decided they did need a Plan B. “We were a little hard-headed. We wanted to go out and explore.”

The three sisters moved to Los Angeles and attempted to balance regular jobs with getting a musical career off the ground. There was a cleaning company, and a brief stint, as Zeimani puts it, of “selling drugs”, which turns out to mean they ran a marijuana dispensary. But it wasn’t as easy as they had hoped. “We kept getting fired,” says BG. “I got fired from Zara for trying to take a couple of trips out of town for shows.” The sisters also drove Uber taxis. “Uber was a lifesaver! I swear, without it I would have been turning tricks,” BG laughs.

To compound their problems, there was the music industry’s attitude towards them. The group “always had soul in mind,” says Zeimani – they were huge fans of Amy Winehouse – but the labels they met with kept pushing them towards pop. “We would go to them with our demos and tell them what we would like to accomplish, with a live band, an orchestra, everything. They were just like: ‘Soul’s not what’s happening right now, here in the States, particularly for brown artists.’”

Hang on – are you saying you were told that Black artists shouldn’t make soul music?

“Yeah, I know,” nods BG, rolling her eyes. “They told our manager that, and he didn’t want to tell us, he was so embarrassed. Eventually, we just put our foot down and said: ‘We’re not doing anything else.’ Couldn’t get anyone to invest in what we were doing, so we funded our own thing.”

Linda and Cecil Womack, the trio’s parents, on stage in 1988

Happily, their own thing caught the attention of Daptone Records, home to Jalen Ngonda, Thee Sacred Souls and the late Sharon Jones, whose house band the Dap-Kings backed Winehouse on her Back to Black album.

The sisters have since released a string of acclaimed singles, among them Chauffeur – which details the downsides of their period as Uber drivers, including realising that you’re invisible to the “fine-looking” man you just picked up – and If I Let You, which last month enjoyed a burst of social media virality after support from a startling array of luminaries: SZA, Timbaland, Ghostface Killah, Pharrell Williams, Erykah Badu and Questlove. One suspects the stars were drawn by the Womack Sisters’ fusion of traditional and modern: the music on their upcoming debut album is as deeply rooted in soul’s past as you’d expect (“We are,” as Kucha puts it, “so familiar with these streets”), but it never feels self-consciously retro.

But it does feel strikingly raw, racked with very real emotion. “We crafted it from our hearts,” says Zeimani. “I wouldn’t say that we had a lot of sorrow to get off our chests, but there is a lot of relationship drama in our family, you know? Our father passed away, our Uncle Bob passed away shortly afterwards. Our aunt, our Uncle Jude’s wife, there was a car accident and she didn’t make it. I lost my husband in Atlanta in 2020 – he was robbed, he got shot, he didn’t survive. You find love, there’s nothing that impacts you more, and to lose it before you can fully experience it – like, we were married but we were about to start a family … I had a really hard time moving through that.

“You know how when we were in the pandemic, we couldn’t do anything? That’s really what you need to do to reset from loss – stop doing everything, just love on yourself, go to the beach, find a reason to smile again.”

Their live shows, meanwhile, are proving triumphant. At the London festival, their set featured a roaring take on Teardrops, their parents’ most enduring hit. No, they say, they aren’t intimidated by their family’s legacy. “We’re proud of them, but they exist in their own right. The time they came up in and the things they faced – segregation, things we can’t even imagine – they saw that,” says Zeimani.

“If you can imagine, our mother came up behind Sam Cooke – and we saw her win Grammys,” nods Kucha. “So I’m just like, well, she did it.”

“She focused on herself – that was her advice to us,” says Zeimani. “And Uncle Bob’s career was piping hot at the same time as my dad’s career was piping hot, so we saw that we could coexist without competing, because they were very different from one another. They always told us: you’re not us and you don’t have to be. You’re you, and there’ll never be anyone like you. We took *that* seriously.”

The Womack Sisters is released 14 August via Daptone

▼ *Diiv, from left, Zachary Cole Smith, Colin Caulfield, Ben Newman and Andrew Bailey*

‘All of a sudden, we had nothing’

Zachary Cole Smith conquered drugs – then lost his home in the LA wildfires. Now his band Diiv are back with a new look, sound – and satirical bent

Jazz Monroe

Zachary Cole Smith used to be a miserable interviewee. He had plenty to say – but spoke with grim introspection, chastising himself and cataloguing his misdeeds with a fervour that engulfed him like his oversized T-shirts. A decade later, the Diiv frontman who materialises on my screen seems well rid of that old self. Suspiciously well rid of it, perhaps. He looks as if he has stepped out of a middle management meeting.

“Precisely!” Smith concurs cheerfully, speaking via video call from a back garden in La Cañada, California. “We’re trying to have a visual language, which is fun.” The singer-guitarist, 41, wears thick-rimmed square glasses, a pinstripe shirt with its neck clasped by a tie printed with stock market emblems and has his black hair slicked back. He has an earnest but pranksterish energy. He uses the word “fun” so many times – more than a dozen within 10 minutes – that I suspect he is testing some sort of subliminal PR strategy.

The Diiv album he is promoting is called Zirp! (meaning “zero interest-rate policy”) and produced by Alex “AG” Cook, the bubbly co-conspirator of Charli xcx. Cook is by no means a natural fit for Diiv, who are one of the least garish bands around. Their buzzy early albums set 80s goth to a motorik pulse, with dream-pop riffs refracted like sunlight into a cobwebbed drawing room. Though they have likely benefited from the TikTok-aided shoegaze revival, their fourth album, 2024’s Frog in Boiling Water, waded into the swamp of anti-capitalist ennui. Cook has helped airlift them out: on Zirp!, for the first time in years, Diiv sound like they are finally having – hang on a minute …

“It’s fun to do something fun,” proclaims Smith, smoking the first of several cigarettes. Today’s costume, accordingly, is based on a darkly comic figure: “the recession-era, stock market-crash guy”. Smith strikes a pose like Rodin’s Thinker – if he had just cost his hedge fund a billion dollars. “This kind of vibe, with the dishevelled suit.”

To go with the look, the band coined a tongue-in-cheek genre dubbed the New Alternative. It reminds Smith of both the loathed Thatcherite slogan “there is no alternative” and the influential Mark Fisher book Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative? “I really want to reclaim that word,” he says. “There *is* an alternative to capitalism.”

For starters, he dreams of a publicly owned streaming library that could operate as an alternative to the current ecosystem, particularly Spotify. “I do feel that that company absolutely should not exist and should be dismantled,” he says. “For Spotify, [music] is just fodder in their ecosystem. They’re selling tech. Apple is a company that’s selling phones. And music is this resource that they can pillage and plunder.”

‘For Spotify and Apple, music is a resource they can pillage and plunder’

One afternoon in January 2025, Smith invited his bandmates to his home in Altadena to demo My Star, a thrashing alt-rock love song to his one-year-old son. As they left, a windstorm was brewing. When nearby Eaton Canyon went up in flames in the wildfires, Smith and his wife, who was seven months pregnant, decided to gather their son’s belongings. “We gotta do bedtime,” he remembers thinking. “Let’s just pack up his little crib and his little jammies and get a hotel room, then the power won’t go out.”

By 3am, their hotel secured, Altadena was ablaze. “Our neighbours were describing the scene: it’s raining orange, it’s snowing orange.” Three hours later, “everything was gone. Then at 6.30am, our son woke up and was just like: ‘What are we doing today!’” As their adrenaline ebbed, the gravity of the loss struck. “All of a sudden, we had nothing. But once he woke up, we just had to make everything be normal.”

Their home was reduced to a pile of rubble. A series of temporary lodgings led the family – now including their second child – to the La Cañada house where they have lived for the past six months. “Where we’re at feels like where we’ll be until we rebuild our house, which is a slow process,” he says. “But one that, I think, at some point, will become fun.”

Work on Zirp! swiftly resumed. Inspired by a 2023 tour supporting Depeche Mode, Smith had decided to “surrender perfectionism, work quickly and not be precious”. Having run into Cook at a party, he cemented the partnership after hearing the grunge anthem Bewitched from the producer’s triple album Britpop. Cook renders Diiv’s shoegaze textures as if in arcade mode: portentous riffs wriggle like pop-punk earworms; feedback harbours micro melodies like radio jingles. “Knowing the songs were gonna wind up in front of Alex made it so much more fun to take risks,” says Smith.

There were other benefits to recruiting an auteur producer. Though Smith single-handedly produced and masterminded the first two Diiv albums, the band gradually became more collaborative as he treated, and finally cut out, his drug use. “Addiction is all about control,” he says. “You want to block out what anybody else is saying, so it lends itself really well to dictatorship.”

His addiction had become a minor scandal in 2013, when Smith and his then-girlfriend, Sky Ferreira, were arrested for possession of heroin and ecstasy (he took full responsibility). He went to rehab, but relapsed. He spent four years talking up Diiv’s second album and playing lacklustre shows in a period of heightened scrutiny: drummer Colby Hewitt was dealing with his own substance use and bassist Devin Ruben Perez had been exposed for bigoted messageboard posts. (Both left the band.) As Diiv threatened to slip through his fingers, Smith became preoccupied with collecting rare coral reefs in a 50-gallon saltwater tank at his Brooklyn apartment.

With the help of his partner nd her mother, Smith kicked drugs in 2017. The “ego destruction” of sobering up prompted him to democratise the band. “I’ve worked to repair the trust with my bandmates and whoever I damaged during my active addiction,” he says. “I just want to utilise that to get us to where we want to be,” moving forward in a “spirit of fun and playfulness and risk and experimentation”.

Smith has spoken relentlessly about all those he has let down. After all that, I ask, how did it feel to receive $100,000 in crowdfunded wildfire aid for his family, from a community that trusts and supports him? “I want to cry just thinking about it,” he says, choking up. “It taught me something, you know? It was profound. I’ve never experienced love like that. And it did feel like …” He sighs. “I felt like I deserved it.” As part of his recovery, Smith has helped others living with addiction and maintained a network of the similarly afflicted. “I feel like we earned it through being good to our friends, family and communities,” he says, “being available to people or letting a band borrow the van. I don’t know how I would have learned that lesson any other way. But it was probably the most meaningful thing that’s ever happened to me, on an interpersonal level.”

The rebuilding of Smith’s family home remains clogged up in various city-planning departments. “But the Altadena community is stronger than it’s ever been,” he says, lighting another cigarette. “The relationships we have with other families that lived on our street is remarkable. Even the crowdfunding – the silver lining is how it showed this sense of community, lifting each other up.” For a little while, it seemed as if the fire would consume their whole world. “It could have felt really alienating, but luckily, we had each other.”

Zirp! is released on 30 October via Fantasy Recordings

◀ *Smith at FYF Fest in Los Angeles, 2016*

PHOTOGRAPHS: LOUIE KOVATCH; KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES

‘My generation got screwed’

After his breakthrough in The Holdovers in 2023, Dominic Sessa has gone back to the 70s again for Tony, the biopic of bad-boy chef Anthony Bourdain. And, he says, a big part of him would like to stay in the decade

Ryan Gilbey

Despite being just 23, Dominic Sessa is perhaps as intimately acquainted with the 1970s as those who grew up in them. Although the New Jersey-born actor has only starred in five films, two of them are marinated in the fashions, sounds and mores of the decade. In his new movie, Tony, he plays the 19-year-old Anthony Bourdain, future bad-boy celebrity chef, bestselling author of Kitchen Confidential and host of its hit TV spin-off. Tony restricts itself to one summer in 1975, when Bourdain bummed around the coastal resort of Provincetown, Massachusetts, falling in love, scrubbing pans in a seafood joint and catching the cooking bug. “For a rootless young man with sensualist inclinations,” Bourdain wrote, “it was the perfect getaway.”

A 70s retro vibe also hung over Sessa’s debut film. In Alexander Payne’s Oscar-winning 2023 comedy-drama The Holdovers, he played Angus Tully, a surly student forced to board at school over Christmas with only his classics teacher and the cook for company. That picture wasn’t merely set in 1970; it seemed, with its faded palette and fake crackles on the print, to have been *made* then.

The most convincing period touch in each film, however, is Sessa himself. He has been described as having a “1970s face”, a euphemism for “unconventional”. His crown of dark, jumbled curls looks as if it was scribbled in crayon by a hyperactive child, while his wide, narrowed eyes are set high and far apart in his upside down triangular face. He projects inner conflict: when Tony and Angus behave arrogantly and disagreeably, even aggressively, Sessa’s features suggest a wounded quality that hints at future self-disgust for any misdeeds.

Sessa was barely aware of Bourdain before making Tony. “I knew of him but he didn’t have any significant meaning for me,” he shrugs, speaking over video call from a Manhattan hotel room. A gangly six-footer, Sessa is all elbows, collarbones and sharp edges as he stares down the webcam in a brown-and-white checked shirt. “I think the only way to do the film honestly and without hesitation was to not have a strong opinion about him.”

Now that he has been immersed in Bourdain’s history, he has clearer ideas about the pioneering chef’s appeal. “I think he made people feel an overwhelming sense of potential in themselves,” he says. “He inspired this movement where there’s hundreds, probably thousands, of YouTube channels by people who dedicate their lives to showcasing what’s being eaten in different parts of the world. He was a rebellious person, someone who acted with integrity.”

Tony’s director Matt Johnson, who brought such vitality to the tech origin story BlackBerry and the recent time-travel comedy Nirvanna the Band the Show the Movie, pointed Sessa towards two chapters from Kitchen Confidential, the memoir written in gunslinger prose and billed as a story of “sex, drugs, bad behaviour and haute cuisine”. There, the actor found the characters who inspired the film’s triumvirate of Provincetown kitchen mentors, the men Bourdain likens to “gods” and “pirates”: the wise head chef (Antonio Banderas), the coke-snorting Jack-the-lad (Leo Woodall) and the taunting, vulgar mischief-maker (Stavros Halkias).

“The restaurant we were filming in had only closed a couple of days earlier, so we were in a fully operating kitchen,” he explains. “Stavros learned how to make lobster rolls, Leo learned to shuck oysters. Matt was, like: ‘Dom, you go in and wash the dishes, and Stavros and Leo are gonna make fun of you.’ They made it all real for me. I felt genuinely intimidated by them. They’re so nice but I think they enjoyed the chance to bully me.”

Dramatising Bourdain’s youthful exploits put Sessa in mind of his own misspent summers growing up on the Jersey Shore. He was raised in Ocean City, which was tranquil throughout the year then bustling with tourists during the holidays. His mother is a teacher; his father, who he has described as “a payroll guy”, died when Sessa was 14. He tells me he got his “opinionated” side from his mum, his sense of humour from his dad. “Jackass was one of the first movies he showed me,” he says fondly.

After his father’s death, Sessa won a sports scholarship to attend Deerfield Academy, a boarding school in Massachusetts. “The only time I’d be home was in the summer breaks when it would basically be like a party. I worked in a bakery where I had early starts, and I’d be getting drunk on the beach before going to work; I was a mess. At that age, you felt you were invincible, you couldn’t get in trouble. We felt like we owned the place. We’d throw beach parties, then cops would chase us off the beach. You’d go to whoever’s house and their parents were gone so you’d destroy the place. We were menaces. Reading about the way Tony described his time in Provincetown, I was like: ‘Yeah, I get that. I understand.’”

‘Doing this interview, I’m pretending to be an adult’

Partying wasn’t the only element in the film that chimed with him. “Playing Tony, I felt as if I was playing an unlikable side of myself,” he says, his tone no longer flippant. “He’s insecure and defensive at the start of the movie. I think a lot of young men have a very defensive way. You want people to respect you and treat you like an adult. But you feel as if you’re pretending. Deep down, there’s something underdeveloped that is hard for us to admit to. We’re always trying

to hide that. I'm constantly going through that in my life."

He sits back in his seat as if surveying the scene before him. "Like, doing this interview, I'm pretending to be an adult, you know? Sometimes when you're young, it's to your detriment that you don't allow yourself to fail in a productive way because you're constantly trying to protect your ego."

What would his remedy be for young men like him? "Wilful hardships," he says. "Deciding to go through hard things. Comfort is attractive. And we've built a culture around the comforts of the world. Where you really develop and learn the most about yourself is in doing something genuinely difficult. That's what Tony does in this film."

The picture opens with a quote from Kitchen Confidential in which Bourdain describes his younger self as being "badly in need of a good ass-kicking". Sessa sings from the same hymn sheet. "These cooks verbally abused each other, ripped each other apart. It's an initiation process in a way, a rite of passage. There's love on the other side of it."

If the actor's view of kitchen life is impossibly romantic, very far from the widespread toxic culture that only this year led to the resignation from Noma of René Redzepi after accusations of workplace abuse, then that is fully in keeping with the tone of Tony. This is a movie so reluctant to spoil the audience's buzz that it doesn't even reveal in the end titles that Bourdain is dead, let alone that he took his own life in 2018.

Any toughness or complexity in the film comes from Sessa, whose performance ratifies his standing as both a 21st-century star-to-be and a 1970s pin-up *manqué*. How does he explain the period fixation? "Maybe it says something about me. Like I want to escape the modern era." Does he? "Yeah, I think so. I love being in the bars, the smell of cigarettes. It's like stepping into a time machine." No mobile phones, no social media. "Everybody's looking up, talking to one another."

Eye contact isn't the only behavioural difference he has noticed. "The impression I get is that young people back then were more confident in speaking, and perhaps more mature in interactions with adults. Nowadays it takes longer. I have friends in college who still can't handle a social environment because of the way we've grown up. Especially after Covid. My generation got *screwed*."

Sessa was at Deerfield when the pandemic struck. "They designed a way to keep us on campus and in a bubble. The kids who got sick were sent to the old abandoned health centre." His low rumble of a voice is interrupted by his sudden, honking laugh, as if acknowledging that this all sounds suspiciously like an episode of Scooby-Doo.

That cabin-fever scenario was almost a rehearsal for playing Angus. "This was right before The Holdovers, so I guess I got used to feeling trapped," he says. In 2022, the film-makers were visiting local schools to scout potential locations, no more expecting to find their Angus than Sessa was anticipating being cast as one of the leads in a Hollywood movie.

As a financial aid student, he had felt out of place initially at Deerfield, where he had gone to pursue his dream of becoming a hockey player. When a broken femur in his freshman year put him out of action before the season had even started, theatre became his backup option.

"I wasn't being myself when I first got to school," he says. "I was acting in a way that wasn't genuine to who I was. I saw these kids, the way they dressed and carried themselves, and I didn't feel I belonged in that environment so I had to role-play how these people were. I didn't think they would accept me otherwise. But once I started doing theatre, I made so many more friends. People wanted to get to know me because I was putting myself out there."

'Once I started doing theatre, I made so many more friends'

Hockey lost its appeal. "I saw it ending and it not being a part of my life much longer. I was never gonna be the best player in school. I would probably be one of the worst." There is no need to remark on his chances of being one of the best actors instead. The acclaim he received for The Holdovers – 21 nominations from awards bodies and critics' circles in the US and UK, including eight wins and a Bafta nod – tells its own story.

In between The Holdovers and Tony, he turned down lead roles and studied drama for a year and a half at Carnegie Mellon University, taking supporting parts to keep his hand in. He played Michelle Pfeiffer's sullen son, recently dumped and strumming an emo version of The 12 Days of Christmas, in the comedy Oh. What. Fun. In Tow, he was a non-profit lawyer whose client (Rose Byrne) tells him: "My car is older than you." Multiplex-goers saw him as an upstart magician with Robin Hood ethics, stealing from crypto bros and diamond magnates, in the threequel Now You See Me: Now You Don't.

It is Tony, though, that he credits for the second turning point in his brief career. If The Holdovers set him on his current path, Tony has helped him decide on the kind of actor – and person – he wants to be. Since making the film, he has been heeding the advice of Bourdain, who wrote: "Good food and good eating are all about risk."

"I've been open to eating in a lot more B- and C-health-rated places," Sessa says. But it's not only about what's on his plate. "In life generally, I feel more motivated now to follow my gut and take risks and live in the moment." He mentions Shades of Paradise, a "crazy Euro-crime film" that he recently made in Barcelona, as an example: it gives him his first bona fide baddie to play after a string of messed-up but essentially decent guys. "I thought: 'This is something really fun that I want to do.'" That's his motto for today. "I'm doing what feels right."

Tony is in cinemas from 14 August

▼ *Sessa appeal ... with Antonio Banderas and Leo Woodall in Tony*

▶ *With Rose Byrne in Tow*

▼ *Cabin fever ... Sessa in The Holdovers with Da'Vine Joy Randolph*

PHOTOGRAPHS: BENEDICT EVANS/THE GUARDIAN; BOB GRUEN/DISHWASHER LLC

PETER BRADSHAW'S FILM OF THE WEEK

Love Me Tender

Vicky Krieps pulls her punches in a brutal custody battle

★★★☆☆

Dir Anna Cazenave Cambet

Starring Vicky Krieps, Antoine Reinartz, Monia Chokri

135 mins, cert 15

Vicky Krieps gives an intelligent, finely calibrated and sensitive performance in this marital-breakdown drama from Anna Cazenave Cambet, who has adapted Constance Debré's novel about her bitter experience of being denied contact with her son after her marriage ended – at the same time as quitting her job, coming out as gay, and *also* becoming a writer (things apparently held against her in France's patriarchal courts).

Krieps is never anything other than excellent. But I wondered sometimes if the reserve and control required from her by the material were quite doing justice to the 18-month ordeal of not being able to see your own child.

Well, perhaps that opacity is what you need to survive, when emotionalism would be interpreted as instability. And there is something inspired in the movie's final internal monologue, heard as Krieps's character cycles along, wondering if she is emerging from a "mourning" period for her son. There is another flash of inspiration from the director in contriving things so that the first clear look we get of the son's face is an hour into the film, at the first court-supervised contact meeting.

Krieps is Clémence, whose shared arrangements around her son Paul (Viggo Ferreira-Redier) with her ex-partner Laurent (Antoine Reinartz) are amicable enough until she reveals to him that she is now dating women. Something in her new sexual identity, and the fact that she is having some success as a writer, triggers a spiteful rage in Laurent, who turns Paul against her. He applies for sole access, coercing their son into writing a bogus deposition statement attacking Clémence. He succeeds in denying access for a year and a half.

Clémence defiantly tries to resist the bullying, to continue with her life of sensual openness, honesty and artistic expression. She finally discovers some intimacy with Sarah (Monia Chokri).

In its moment-by-moment transcription of the crushing banality of injustice, the film is offering a bitter slice of life.

As for Laurent, he is a mystery: petulant, angry, resentful. Perhaps there could be another story to tell about his pathos. This is an intelligent, sensual movie that never quite arrives at the explosive moment it appears to promise.

The Summer Book

★★★☆☆

Dir Charlie McDowell

Starring Glenn Close, Anders Danielsen Lie, Emily Matthews

95 mins, cert PG

Glenn Close brings her totemic presence to this gentle movie – as well as a makeup-aged grandmotherly face. This is an adaptation of Tove Jansson's 1972 novel; it has charm, though it's sometimes becalmed in its own sensitivity.

Close plays a tough, wise, humorous-yet-cantankerous eightysomething woman who likes smoking cigarettes and walking around naked when there's no one there. She brings her recently widowed son (Anders Danielsen Lie) and six-year-old granddaughter Sophia (Emily Matthews) to a tiny, idyllic island in the Gulf of Finland, where they have a summer cottage.

It is here that the family hope to come to terms with what happened to Sophia's mum (though we do not discover how she died). Close's very watchable performance shows us how the grandmother is taking on the burden of simply being there for Sophia, while her son retreats into his own sadness and what she calls his self-pity. In fact, the film does not give us much idea what he is thinking, perhaps wasting the acting talents of Danielsen Lie.

We are, of course, approaching a moment of catharsis; this arrives with a storm that endangers their boat trip. It is an unwritten movie rule that lovable old people paired with the very young have to die before the closing credits. But in a film like this, already about death, it isn't clear if the rule applies; consequently, there is a kind of generic uncertainty about the grandmother's fate. Without Close, this might have been insipid; with her, it is affecting and distinctive.

How to Feed a Dictator

★★★★☆

Dir Andrew Neel

With Hoshiyar Ali, Ruth Ben-Ghiat, Bruce Bueno de Mesquita

95 mins, no cert

There are moments in this sly documentary that evoke regular food porn, with crisply lit footage of vegetables being chopped, meat getting grilled – all the culinary sizzle. Then there are overhead views of the finished product, elegantly garnished, with text identifying, say, a Chilean country stew, or a whole roast goat, made to suit the taste of a very specific client. It's just that these clients were despots, including Pol Pot, Idi Amin, Saddam Hussein, Augusto Pinochet and Kim Jong-il. Charles Otonde Odera once prepared a human heart "perfectly" for Amin.

Director Andrew Neel and editor Brad Turner skilfully weave together interviews with the chefs, each one in denial to varying degrees. Odera seems the most clear-eyed, with Cambodian Keo Samoun a distant second, claiming she was just a kid (still in her teens) when she was recruited to cook for Pol Pot. Meanwhile, Chilean chef Coco Pacheco is unrepentant, proud to have done his bit to tickle the palate of the man responsible for murdering thousands. Ermanno Furlanis, on the other hand, still looks a bit baffled how he ended up making pizza for Kim Jong-il while millions of North Koreans starved.

The contrast between the lavish spreads of food, while the poor of these nations withered away, turns out to be a feature, not a one-off. The monumental cruelty is parsed intelligently by journalists such as Ruth Ben-Ghiat, rigorously unforgiving as she is articulate, and Riccardo Orizio, who provides a perspicacious bird's eye view of dictatorial cuisine. This is one food-centric film that's unlikely to have a tie-in cookbook. **Leslie Felperin**

GAMES

Big Walk

PC, PS 5, Nintendo Switch 2

★★★★☆

Radiant sunsets glinting on lapping waves; bushland valleys that beckon with secrets; modernist buildings sat atop craggy ridges … Big Walk's setting is as arresting as it is beguiling, but it is the images created by players that lodge deepest in the mind. Here's one that has stuck with me: in the black of night, cicadas kicking up an almighty din, I had lost my partner. Panic. Despair. Fear. Then, there in the far distance, I saw him. He was relentlessly spamming a gigantic lamp on and off, like a single Christmas light blinking from afar.

This kind of encounter is common in Big Walk, the whimsical new online co-op puzzler from House House, the studio behind Untitled Goose Game. Here you are a bug-eyed, gangly-limbed bird person for whom getting separated from your mates is part of the fun. That's somewhat because this rugged terrain is dense with vegetation and cliffs to fall down, and also because the game makes ingenious use of proximity and direction-based voice audio. Step out of earshot of your party and you find it difficult to call to each other.

You come across challenges that veer from the straightforward to the brain-scrambling: shoot the aforementioned lamp into a hoop; arrange wooden pegs decorated with nature-themed symbols into some kind of shape. You'll experience moments of intense cooperative concentration followed by stretches of downtime – the actual walking is the least interesting part of the game – and frustration can build as you traipse through the same patch time and again.

The beauty of Big Walk lies in how it tasks you with working together, conversing verbally and physically, to access its most enchanting sights. It offers a gentle experience that seems expressly designed to foster enriching connections and childlike playfulness. **Lewis Gordon**

ALEXIS PETRIDIS'S ALBUM OF THE WEEK

Ravyn Lenae Blue Island

A pop one-off who is most exciting when she lets her freak flag fly

Pop

Atlantic

★★★★☆

It sometimes seems as if no musical success in the 2020s is allowed to pass without some degree of online controversy. There may be accusations that the artist is an "industry plant" or there's something deceptive about the way they've been promoted, or they're possessed of some other form of moral bankruptcy. Which brings us to Love Me Not, an ostensibly harmless 2024 track by Chicago singer-songwriter Ravyn Lenae.

Taken from Bird's Eye, an album that also featured collaborations with Childish Gambino and Ty Dolla $ign, its blend of retro-soul styling, distorted guitar arpeggios and infernally catchy chorus was noticeably poppier than Lenae's previous work: it came with a remix that featured British bedroom-pop star Rex Orange County. After enjoying online virality, it became a huge hit single.

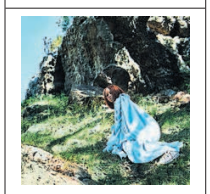
It went Top 5 in the US and the UK: you could understand why fans of the glitchy, abstract R&B found on 2015's EP Moon Shoes, or of her more neo soul-flavoured debut album, 2022's Hypnos, might consider it a straightforward bid for mainstream acceptance. But you'd argue against it necessitating an online interrogation that, Lenae has suggested, involved not just "picking apart what kind of music I make" but "questioning my identity and Blackness".

Said interrogation seems to have prompted a degree of doubling-down from Lenae. The first thing you hear on Blue Island, as opener Handle gets under way, is another earworm pop chorus, a squeal of feedback and grungy electric guitar. It's followed by Familiar Dreams, retro pop-soul that sounds almost exactly like what you'd expect of a well-turned follow-up to Love Me Not. Meanwhile, Lenae's list of inspirations for the album features not just Santigold and Janet Jackson but Blondie, the Cranberries, the Sundays and, most surprisingly, Martin Rev. If Wish You Well definitely sounds like a charming gene-splice between the Cranberries and the soft-hued Janet Jackson of Runaway or That's The Way Love Goes, it's a little harder to discern the musical influence of Rev's confrontational electronic punk duo Suicide on Blue Island. But perhaps it's present in more of a spiritual capacity, Suicide having relentlessly pursued their own artistic path in the face of some fairly concerted efforts by the public to get them to stop.

There are certainly a lot of lyrics here that present as love songs but seem suspiciously like they're about something else: "I'm leaving without you"; "all those limits to your pleasure keep me climbing". And there's palpable glee in the album's sudden stylistic shifts. The 90s R&B-infused Never Let Me Go and Babygirl rub up against In & Out's sparkly alt-rock; Potential proceeds along prettily enough in pop-ballad form before it unexpectedly erupts into a squall of guitar noise and a ferocious, juddering rhythm that sounds remarkably like Squarepusher. And Blue Island isn't as jarring as that suggests, partly because of the unifying power of Lenae's voice – a lovely, breathy soprano – but largely because the writing is buffed to a state of pop perfection.

Its hit rate isn't perfect. There are a couple of moments among the 14 tracks that feel a bit boilerplate: an acoustic duet with Dominic Fike, Reputation, is pleasant enough but could be the work of pretty much anyone; the electro-influenced beat of Saturday Night is great, the song itself not so much. And it could have done with a couple more moments like Potential, when Lenae metaphorically lets her freak flag fly – not least because when she does, it's hugely exciting, as on the chaotic, distorted closer Let Us In.

It's another song that seems to obliquely address the controversy of Love Me Not – you could read its lyrics as a plea for acceptance for artists that decline to fit a standard mould – but Blue Island has already answered Ravyn Lenae's critics long before it appears: its collage of styles makes for an original, idiosyncratic pop album worth celebrating rather than picking apart for ulterior motives.



Folk album of the month

Artist Angeline Morrison and Arun Sood

Album Donn/Dubh

Label Real World

★★★★★

Two of Britain's most exciting folk musicians, both of Hebridean heritage, are behind this album inspired by Saltair na Rann, a 10th-century Celtic collection of cantos. Angeline Morrison and Arun Sood expand its spectrum with textures of distortion, drone, dream-pop and post-rock.

The pair have the chops for it. Morrison, co-founder of the Black British Folk Collective, has brilliantly brought forgotten Black histories into the folk canon for years. Sood has used sonic collage to conjure the lives of residents on his grandmother's abandoned home island of Vallay.

Their talents converge around Alastair Smith's startling production: Morrison's deep voice, ghostly one moment, is lullaby-warm the next. But she opens A Rìbhinn a Bheil Cuimhn' Agad over a softly played piano, and gentler moments like this anchor the pair's giddy explorations.

Sweeter touches include Mo Nighean Donn As Bòidhche, rippling by on shimmering electronics, and Teann A-nall Mo Chailin Donn, setting a Uist love song against gauzy synthesisers.

The darker turns are powerful: Tha Mi Sgìth twists Sood's daughters' voices into Boards of Canada-adjacent folk horror. Full of febrile layers, this album's ambitions unpeel with every tantalising listen. **Jude Rogers**

Pop

Artist Flo

Album Therapy at the Club

Label EMI

★★★☆☆

When Flo burst out in 2022 the trio were hailed as the second coming of the R&B girl group. Their debut album Access All Areas didn't quite hit as expected – only one single scraped the Top 40 – but they sound undeterred on a vibey second album that adds lyrical spice and musical left turns.

Therapy at the Club follows the flow of a night out, but one rooted in romantic disappointment rather than euphoric release. Pose is a pared-back interpolation of Pump Up the Jam, skittering hi-hat hits echoing the clicks of confidence-boosting burst-mode selfies. On Remedied, Flo are distracted by admin as big-band horns blast behind an anxious beat.

Like any self-respecting girl group, Flo have their balladry down: Floating is a belter. But at 16 often mid-paced tracks, the album drags. Miss U Missing Me meanders through a ghosting situation that ends up feeling kind of justified.

There's self-assurance to its unhurried pace, but more time sweating it out on the dancefloor would make this a more satisfying listen. **Kate Solomon**

Classical

Artist Van de Wiel/Soloists of the Philharmonia

Album Strange Loops: Clarinet Quintets

Label Signum

★★★★☆

Mark van de Wiel was principal clarinet of the Philharmonia from 2000 until 2025, during which time he gave the UK premiere of Anna Clyne's Strange Loops. The title describes a cyclic system where, by moving up or down through different hierarchical levels, you unexpectedly find yourself back at the beginning.

Composed during lockdown, Clyne's klezmer-inflected musical loops do just that. It makes a buoyant, yet bittersweet opener, meticulously realised by Van de Wiel with violinists Zsolt-Tihamér Visontay and Fiona Cornall, Nicholas Bootiman on viola and cellist Karen Stephenson.

Clyne's slinky, 21st-century riffs couldn't be further from the pastoral calm of Ruth Gipps' 1942 Rhapsody in E-flat. Van de Wiel is dark-toned and buttery in a performance that matches dramatic resolve with sonic beauty.

Finally, Weber's Clarinet Quintet gets a virtuoso outing with plenty of colour and pliable tempi. Van de Wiel shapes the solo clarinet lines with imagination and dramatic flair, but his fellow musicians also get their moments in the sun in a generous account. **Clive Paget**

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REVIEW BY LUCY MANGAN

Possession

◀ *Gugu Mbatha-Raw as Claudia*

Ghosts of slavery haunt Jamaica in supernatural legal thriller

★★★☆☆

Sky Atlantic

What do you do when a client worth £50m - thanks to family ownership of a Jamaican sugar plantation upon which a modern fortune was built - pops his clogs and is unexpectedly revealed to have cut his only child out of his will, leaving the lot to a hitherto unknown "African national" called Cudjoe East? Why, you call in your firm's (likely only) biracial lawyer, Claudia (Gugu Mbatha-Raw), to go over to Kingston, find him and discredit him. "Sounds like a job for a partner, really," replies Claudia and, promotion thus secured, duly heads out for her mother's homeland. She may wish, before we are very far in, that she had gone for senior partnership.

The planter's house is one that has been appearing to her in recent nightmares that have been full of fires, terrified figures and strange symbols. But! She is a woman of the law, not superstition, so she sets the screaming Afro-gothic warnings aside and gets on with searching the house for anything that could suggest the pro-Cudjoe will is invalid and questioning the locals for any clue as to where Cudjoe himself might be. Her late client's driver Angelo (Jeff Crossley) tells her that he introduced the pair about six months ago when his boss wanted to learn more about local history. Angelo assures her that she will not be able to talk Cudjoe into giving up his legacy.

Soon Oliver (Jonny Lee Miller, in posh, nervy mode), the disinherited son, has joined her so that they can investigate and - he is divorced as well as disinherited - build sexual tension together.

What follows is a dual-timeline mystery. One story unfolds in the present, another 300 years ago when the estate was staffed by enslaved people, overseen by increasingly cruel members of Oliver's ancestral line and facing the series of rebellions known as Tacky's War - with a supernatural inflection that allows the two increasingly to mesh. Claudia's nightmares increase, populated perhaps by spectral members of other ancestral lines. Images and objects that appear in the dream world turn up in the house, along with documents that make the abstract horrors of colonialism concrete. The spirits with which the local people think the house, their land, their culture is infused become increasingly restless. If you believe in that kind of thing, of course - but it does become much harder to deny once Oliver has been levitated and bounced off the ceiling by an unseen force.

When Claudia meets Cudjoe (Sheldon Shepherd), he is as intractable as Angelo promised, but also claims to be nearly 300 years old - the surviving, or surviving incarnation of, Matthew, the illegitimate son (which is to say, a child conceived by the rape of an enslaved woman) of the then landowner. Matthew was promised his freedom and the estate by his father, but was denied it by Charlotte (Bel Powley), their father's legitimate daughter. Who may or may not have hastened her father's death from tongue cancer - strangely contracted after he cut out Matthew's grandmother's tongue as a punishment for possible involvement in an abortive uprising.

So the past's injustices and legacies work themselves into and through the present. Possession is the first full-length work from Karla Crome, so far best known for her acting roles in Misfits, You, Me and the Apocalypse and most recently in Something Very Bad Is Going to Happen. It is a potent conjuring of the pervasive, enduring evils and toxicities of colonialism and a powerful look at how unadmitted sins and guilt manifest themselves and whether justice for some crimes can ever be done. Are reparations possible? Where does responsibility begin and end? What is better: ancestral spirit vengeance upon the guilty's descendants, or a boss's modern exploitation of your skin colour for "optics" into money and promotion?

For some the accumulating paranormal-mystical element will add to the dread and horror. For others, there is a danger that it obscures the truth of the story and the suffering. Where you land, I suppose, largely depends on whether you feel that ghosts and spirits are capable of thinking up and delivering any worse experiences than man seems able to conjure and visit on his fellow man. Part of me always feels that recourse to the diabolic or ineffable is a cop-out, but that is undoubtedly a vast failure of imagination on my part.

But either way, Possession is a well-textured, evocative tale touching on many important questions, if never quite digging down far enough into any of them to be truly satisfying.

What's On
Scan the QR code below to sign up for the What's On newsletter, our free TV email with the best reviews and news direct to your inbox every Monday

WHAT TO WATCH

Grimsburg
10.15pm, Sky One

A triple bill of this adult cartoon starring Jon Hamm, which quietly debuted in the UK last week. Hamm plays police detective Marvin Flute (*above*), who has moved back to his home town to reconnect with his family – and solve bizarre crimes. This time, there are easy laughs to be had as he finds himself accused of murdering a judge and tries to clear his own name. **Hollie Richardson**

Granite Harbour
8pm, BBC One

The Scottish cop drama wraps up its third series with youthful duo DS Bartlett and DC Lindo determined to untangle the motives behind a teenage girl's murder on a country estate. But with their prime suspect dead and the special police investigations service scrutinising their conduct, it won't be easy. **Graeme Virtue**

Surgery Secrets of the Super Rich
8pm, Channel 4

Do we all live inside the "circle of shame" now? In this chillingly dystopian testament to beauty standards, Hannah is celebrating her engagement with a "bridal package" of treatments for her big day. These include inserting threads in her cheeks and up her nose for a liquid rhinoplasty. All for a cool £3k. Congratulations! **Priya Elan**

Corsica: Jewel of the Mediterranean
8pm, Channel 5

Joanna Lumley's velvety tones narrate this look at the good life in Corsica, an island off the south coast of France. We meet a banker turned baker who makes irresistible biscuits, and a university lecturer who is also a chestnut farmer. Plus, the citadel gets a facelift. **HR**

Bergerac
9pm, BBC Two

Damien Molony is an alluringly unstable and impassioned detective in this smart reboot of the 1980s Jersey crime drama. This week, Jim Bergerac alarms his colleagues with a manic whiteboard presentation, fuelled by his obsessive desire to bring down supercilious bigwig Arthur Wakefield (Philip Glenister). **Jack Seale**

Ann Droid
9.30pm, BBC One

An endlessly laugh-out-loud episode of the comedy about a widow and her robot carer. Sue (Sue Johnston) invites her son and his girlfriend over for wine and crisps, but she's still not convinced about them: "Not eating prawn cocktail crisps? He's forgotten who he is." Meanwhile, unbearable frenemy Phyllis gets bad news. **HR**

BBC One

6.0 Breakfast (T) **9.30** Animal Park (T) (R) **10.15** Trace, Track, Get My Car Back (T) (R) **10.45** Expert Witness (T) (R) **11.15** Homes Under the Hammer (T) (R) **12.15** Bargain Hunt (T) **1.0** News (T) **1.35** Regional News and Weather (T) **1.45** News (T) **2.0** The Hairdresser Mysteries (T) **2.45** Escape to the Country (T) (R) **3.45** The Bidding Room (T) **4.30** The Answer Run (T) **5.15** Pointless (T) (R) **6.0** News (T) **6.30** Regional News and Weather (T) **7.0** The One Show (T) **7.30** Our Lives (T)

8.0 **Granite Harbour** (T) Lindo and Bart face a race against time to find the real killer. Last in the series.
9.0 **Would I Lie to You?** (T) (R) With guest panellists Cush Jumbo, Judi Love, Grayson Perry and Tim Vine.
9.30 **Ann Droid** (T) Sue invites Michael and Renee to a nice family dinner.

10.0 News (T)
10.30 Regional News (T) Weather
10.45 FILM **28 Days Later** (Danny Boyle, 2002) (T) A man fights to survive after Britain is devastated by a virus that leaves its victims consumed with homicidal rage. Horror, starring Cillian Murphy.
12.30 Weather for the Week Ahead (T) **12.35** News (T)

BBC Two

6.30 Money for Nothing (T) (R) **7.15** The Bidding Room (T) (R) **8.0** Sign Zone: Marcus Wareing Simply Provence (T) (R) **9.0** News (T) **1.0** House of Games (T) (R) **1.30** The Finish Line (T) (R) **2.15** Do You Know Your Place? (T) (R) **2.45** The Hairy Bikers' Bakeation (T) (R) **3.45** The Farmers' Country Showdown (T) (R) **4.30** Vintage Antiques Roadshow (T) (R) **5.15** Flog It! (T) (R) **6.0** Richard Osman's House of Games (T) (R) **6.30** Just One Thing (T) (R) **7.0** Iolo's Anglesey (T) (R) **7.30** Beechgrove Garden (T)

8.0 **Gardeners' World** (T) Arit Anderson visits an inspiring edible garden in London.
9.0 **Bergerac** (T) Chloe finds evidence proving that there is some truth in John Blakely's accusations.
9.45 **QI XL** (T) (R) With panellists Ria Lina, Eshaan Akbar, Jimmy Carr and Alan Davies. Hosted by Sandi Toksvig.

10.30 Newsnight (T) Weather
11.05 FILM **Hoard** (Luna Carmoon, 2023) (T) A fostered teenage girl revisits her childhood memories. Drama, starring Saura Lightfoot-Leon, Joseph Quinn and Hayley Squires.
1.0 Sign Zone Panorama: Britain's Strictest Schools (T) (R) **1.30** The Rapture (T) (R) **2.30** This Is BBC Two (T)

ITV1

6.0 Good Morning Britain (T) **10.0** This Morning (T) **1.30** News and Weather (T) **1.55** Local News and Weather (T) **2.0** Dickinson's Real Deal (T) (R) **3.0** Deal Or No Deal (T) (R) **4.0** Tipping Point (T) (R) **5.0** The Chase (T) (R) **6.0** Local News and Weather (T) **6.30** News and Weather (T)

7.30 **EFL Cup Live** (T) Middlesbrough v Wrexham (kick-off 8pm). Mark Pougatch presents all the action from the first-round tie between the two Championship sides at Riverside Stadium.

10.25 News (T) Weather
10.55 Local News (T) Weather
11.15 FILM **Jack Reacher: Never Go Back** (Edward Zwick, 2016) (T) Action thriller sequel, starring Tom Cruise and Cobie Smulders.
1.10 Shop on TV **3.0** Force of Nature (T) (R) **3.50** Long Lost Family (T) (R) **4.45** Unwind With ITV (T)

Channel 4

6.30 The King of Queens (T) (R) **7.45** Everybody Loves Raymond (T) (R) **9.10** Frasier (T) (R) **11.10** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA (T) (R) **12.05** News (T) **12.10** Find It, Fix It, Flog It (T) (R) **1.10** The Great House Giveaway (T) (R) **2.10** Countdown (T) **3.0** A Place in the Sun (T) (R) **4.0** Saving Country Houses With Penelope Keith (T) (R) **5.0** Chateau DIY (T) (R) **6.0** American Pickers (T) (R) **7.0** News (T)

8.0 **Surgery Secrets of the Super Rich** (T) Hannah has a non-surgical liquid nose job, while Hollie tackles sun damage with laser technology.
9.0 **8 Out of 10 Cats Does Countdown** (T) Jimmy Carr hosts, as team captains Rob Beckett and Jon Richardson are joined by Katherine Ryan and Fatiha El-Ghorri.

10.0 Big Fat Quiz: Best Bits (T)
11.05 **Sarah Millican: Home Bird Live** (T) (R) Standup show.
12.10 Greg Davies: The Back of My Mum's Head (T) (R) **1.05** Ramy (T) **1.40** Ramy (T) **2.15** FILM **Theater Camp** (2023) (T) Comedy, starring Ben Platt and Molly Gordon. **3.50** Sunday Brunch (T) (R) **4.0** Four in a Bed (T) (R)

Channel 5

6.0 Milkshake! **9.15** Jeremy Vine (T) **11.30** Storm & Alexis (T) **12.45** News (T) **12.50** Matt Allwright (T) **2.20** FILM The Book Club Murders (Logan Giese, 2024) (T) **4.0** Castle (T) (R) **4.55** Love Nature (T) (R) **5.0** News (T) **6.0** Menorca: A Year in the Sun (T) (R) **6.55** News (T) **7.0** Tom Read Wilson's Grand Tour (T) (R) **7.55** News (T)

8.0 **Corsica: Jewel of the Mediterranean** (T) A focus on the French island, once owned by Italy, which has 600 miles of coastline, plus forests and mountains.
9.0 **Alexander Armstrong in South Korea** (T) (R) A journey across one of the most influential and successful countries on Earth.

10.30 **Piers Morgan: Uncensored** (T) Opinion-led news.
12.0 Fare Dodgers: At War With the Law (T) (R) **1.0** Cruise TV (T) (R) **2.0** GPs: Behind Closed Doors (T) (R) **2.50** Castle (T) (R) **3.40** Friends (T) (R) **4.30** Jane McDonald's Yorkshire: No Place Like Home (T) (R) **5.35** Milo (T) (R) **5.45** Paddington (T) (R)

BBC Four

7.0 **Also Sprach Zarathustra at the Proms** (T) A trio of pieces inspired by the wonders of the sky, with music by Strauss, Judith Weir and Ravel.

8.20 **Top of the Pops** (T) (R) Featuring All Saints, Honeyz and Kelis. From 2000.
8.45 **Top of the Pops** (T) (R) From 1984, including Tracey Ullman and Hazell Dean.
9.15 **Top of the Pops** (T) (R) From 1988, featuring Kim Wilde.
9.45 **Tony Bennett at the London Palladium: BBC Sessions** (T) (R) A 2011 concert.

10.45 Tony Bennett Sings: Songs from the Movies (T) (R)
11.15 Tony Bennett Sings: His Personal Hit Songbook (T) (R)
11.50 Tony Bennett Sings: Songs of Broadway (T) (R)
12.20 Tony Bennett Sings: Saloon Songs (T) (R) **12.55** Tony Bennett Sings **1.55** Tony Bennett's New York (T) (R) **3.20** Top of the Pops (T) (R)

Other channels

BBC Three

7.0pm The Catch Up **7.05** I Am Darren **7.20** FILM Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian (2009) **9.0** Death in Paradise **10.0** Ghosts Australia **10.20** Ghosts Australia **10.45** The Golden Cobra **12.40** Ideal **1.10** Ideal **3.35** Calamity James

U&Dave

6.0am Teleshopping **7.25** Top Gear **8.20** Border Force: America's Gatekeepers **9.20** Border Force: America's Gatekeepers **10.20** Rick Stein: From Venice to Istanbul **11.20** Yukon Gold **12.20** Top Gear **1.20** Top Gear **2.20** Mortimer & Whitehouse: Gone Fishing **3.0** Martin Clunes: Islands of Australia **4.0** Rick Stein: From Venice to Istanbul **5.0** Rick Stein's Cornwall **5.30** Rick Stein's Cornwall **6.0** Hairy Bikers' Best of British **7.0** Mortimer & Whitehouse: Gone Fishing **7.40** Would I Lie to You? **8.20** QI XL **9.20** Would I Lie to You? **10.0** Magnum PI **11.0** Magnum PI **12.0** Mock the Week **12.40** Would I Lie to You? **1.20** Would I Lie to You? **2.0** QI **2.30** QI **3.15** Richard Osman's House of Games **4.0** Teleshopping

E4

6.0am Modern Family **6.55** Rude(ish) Tube Shorts **7.0** Couples Come Dine With Me **8.0** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **9.0** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **10.0** America's Funniest Home Videos **11.0** Below Deck: Mediterranean **12.0** The Simpsons **2.0** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **2.30** Brooklyn Nine-Nine **3.0** Modern Family **5.0** The Simpsons **5.30** The Simpsons **6.0** The Simpsons **6.30** The Simpsons **7.0** The Simpsons **7.30** The Simpsons **8.0** Vanderpump Rules **9.0** Celebrity Gogglebox for Stand Up to Cancer **10.0** FILM American Pie: The Wedding (2003) **11.55** Naked Attraction **1.0** Gogglebox **2.0** Vanderpump Rules **3.0** Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA **3.50** The Goldbergs **4.15** The Goldbergs **4.40** Brooklyn Nine-Nine

Film4

11.0am FILM Oliver! (1968) **1.55** FILM Sherlock Holmes and the Secret Weapon (1942) **3.15** FILM Buchanan Rides Alone (1958) **4.50** FILM The True Story of Jesse James (1957) **6.40** FILM Ad Astra (2019) **9.0** FILM The Martian (2015) **11.50** FILM Last Night in Soho (2021) **2.05** FILM Sick of Myself (2023)

PBS America

6.0am Teleshopping **8.0** Weathered: Earth's Extremes **8.35** Conquistadors: The Rise and Fall **9.35** The Real Truth **10.40** The Rosenbergs: Atomic Spies **11.50** Hunting the KGB Killers **1.0** Weathered: Earth's Extremes **1.35** Conquistadors: The Rise and Fall **2.45** The Real Truth **3.45** The Rosenbergs: Atomic Spies **4.55** Hunting the KGB Killers **6.05** Conquistadors: The Rise and Fall **7.05** The Real Truth **8.15** The Rosenbergs: Atomic Spies **9.30** Hunting the KGB Killers **10.40** The Real Truth **12.0** The Rosenbergs: Atomic Spies **1.15** Weathered: Earth's Extremes **2.0** Teleshopping

Sky One

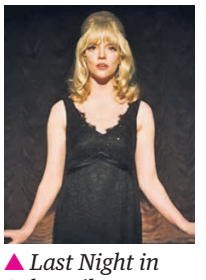
6.0am Mornings With Jones and Melbourne **6.30** Mornings With Jones and Melbourne **7.0** Mornings With Jones and Melbourne **7.30** Mornings With Jones and Melbourne **8.0** Stargate SG-1 **9.0** NCIS: Los Angeles **10.0** Will & Grace **10.30** Will & Grace **11.0** The Simpsons **11.30** The Simpsons **12.0** Moon: Nature's Secret Force **1.0** Hawaii Five-0 **2.0** Hawaii Five-0 **3.0** S.W.A.T **4.0** S.W.A.T **5.0** The Simpsons **5.30** The Simpsons **6.0** Animal Control **7.0** The Simpsons **8.0** An Idiot Abroad 2 **9.0** Micky Flanagan: If Ever We Needed It **10.15** Grimsburg **11.45** Animal Control **12.45** Grimm **1.40** The Force: Manchester **2.30** Road Wars **3.0** Hawaii Five-0 **4.0** S.W.A.T **5.0** S.W.A.T

Sky Arts

6.0am Cirque Du Soleil: Varekai **8.0** The Joy of Painting **8.30** The Joy of Painting **9.0** Tales of the Unexpected **9.30** Tales of the Unexpected **10.0** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **10.30** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **11.0** Discovering: Dean Martin **12.0** Agatha Christie's Pale Horse **2.0** The Alfred Hitchcock Hour **3.0** The Eighties **4.0** Discovering: Peter Sellers **5.0** Portrait Artist of the Year 2022 **6.0** Tales of the Unexpected **6.30** Tales of the Unexpected **7.0** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **7.30** Alfred Hitchcock Presents **8.0** Bob Dylan: The Other Side of the Mirror **9.35** I Was a Teenage Sex Pistol **11.20** Classic Albums **12.20** The Jam: Live at Rockpalast **1.50** Pretenders Live and Loose in LA **3.45** Sky Arts Book Club **4.45** Sean Connery vs James Bond

Sky Atlantic

6.0am Richard E Grant's Hotel Secrets **8.0** Billions **9.10** Billions **10.20** Heated Rivalry **12.30** Homicide: Life on the Street **1.30** Homicide: Life on the Street **2.30** Billions **3.35** Billions **4.40** The Last of Us **6.05** The Last of Us **7.0** The Penguin **8.0** The Penguin **9.0** Station Eleven **10.0** Station Eleven **11.0** The Last of Us **12.0** True Detective: Night Country **1.30** Billions **2.40** Billions **3.50** Billions **5.0** Urban Secrets



▲ *Last Night in Soho, Film4*

Radio

Radio 3

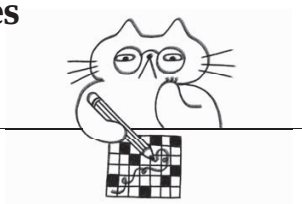
6.30am Breakfast **9.30** Essential Classics **1.0** Classical Live. From the Proms, Elena Schwarz conducts the BBC National Orchestra of Wales and violinist Alina Ibragimova in Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto in E minor. Plus, from the Ryedale festival, Schubert's Death and the Maiden Quartet, played by the Aris Quartet and Novo Quartet. **4.0** Composer of the Week: Mozart (5/5) **5.0** In Tune **7.0** BBC Proms 2026. Nil Venditti conducts the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, the Epiphoni Consort, soprano Federica Lombardi,, mezzo Chiara Amarù, tenor René Barbera and bass Nicola Ulivieri in Respighi's Church Windows and Rossini's Stabat Mater. **10.0** Late Junction. Dan Gilmore revisits forgotten hard-drive recordings, and Verity Sharp previews Poland's Sanatorium of Sound festival. **11.30** 'Round Midnight **12.30** Through the Night

Radio 4

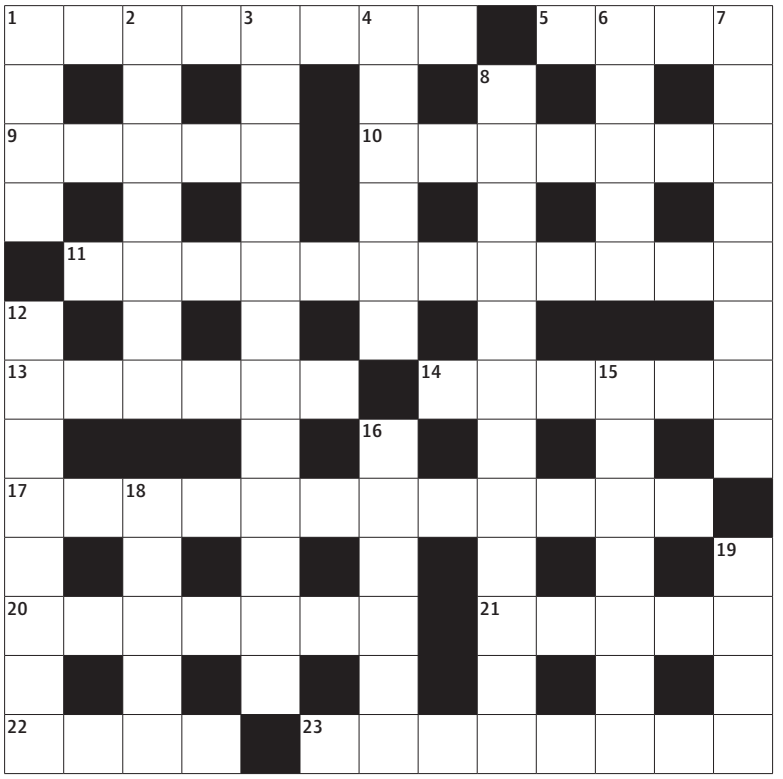
6.0am Today **9.0** Desert Island Discs (R) **10.0** Woman's Hour **11.0** The Food Programme. Sheila Dillon explores the practice of maturing cheese. **11.45** Tony Hawks Is Giving Nothing Away (R) **12.0** News **12.04** AntiSocial **12.57** Weather **1.0** The World at One **1.45** The Bare Necessities. Dan Richards seeks out the tradition-bearers who choose to live in close connection with the natural world. (5/5) **2.0** The Archers (R) **2.15** Central Intelligence. Espionage drama, by Greg Haddrick. In 1966, as Soviet nuclear fears grow, the CIA turns to satellites, surveillance and one desperate gamble: training a cat to spy on the KGB. With Kim Cattrall and Johnny Flynn. (5/10) **2.45** Living on the Edge (R) **3.0** Gardeners' Question Time **3.45** Short Works. Parys, Anglesey, by Fflur Dafydd. **4.0** Last Word **4.30** Sideways (R) **5.0** PM. **5.57** Weather **6.0** News **6.30** Current-ish. Lucy Porter and guests discuss the stories everyone is talking about. (3/3) **7.0** The Archers **7.15** Screenshot. Ellen E Jones and Mark Kermode explore how film and TV have reflected changing ideas about masculinity and emotional intimacy. (6/6) **8.0** Any Questions? **8.55** This Week in History (R) **9.0** Natalie Haynes Stands Up for the Classics (R) **9.30** Breakin' the Cycle (R) **9.59** Weather **10.0** The World Tonight **10.45** Book at Bedtime: The Vicar of Wakefield. By Oliver Goldsmith. (5/10) **11.0** Americast. Analysis of cultural and social stories in the US. **11.30** The Ocean Within Us (R) **12.0** News **12.30** Tony Hawks Is Giving Nothing Away (R) **12.48** Shipping Forecast **1.0** As World Service **5.30** News **5.34** Shipping Forecast **5.43** Prayer for the Day **5.45** Living on the Edge (R)

Radio 4 Extra

6.0am The Waiting Game (4/6) **6.30** Who Killed Aldrich Kemp? (5/5) **7.0** Little Blighty on the Down (5/5) **7.30** Beyond Our Ken **8.0** The Confessional (4/6) **8.30** Following Pappano (5/5) **8.45** Small Island (10/15) **9.0** Olga Koch: OK Computer (1/4) **9.30** Behind the Taverna (5/5) **9.45** Daily Service **10.0** Soul Music (4/5) **10.30** The Forum (3/5) **11.0** The Waiting Game (4/6) **11.30** Who Killed Aldrich Kemp? (5/5) **12.0** Little Blighty on the Down (5/5) **12.30** Beyond Our Ken **1.0** The Confessional (4/6) **1.30** Following Pappano (5/5) **1.45** Small Island (10/15) **2.0** The Museum of Curiosity (3/6) **2.30** Millport (3/6) **3.0** Berlin (2/2) **4.0** Soul Music (4/5) **4.30** The Forum (3/5) **5.0** The Waiting Game (4/6) **5.30** Who Killed Aldrich Kemp? (5/5) **6.0** Little Blighty on the Down (5/5) **6.30** Beyond Our Ken **7.0** The Confessional (4/6) **7.30** Following Pappano (5/5) **7.45** Small Island (10/15) **8.0** The Museum of Curiosity (3/6) **8.30** Millport (3/6) **9.0** Berlin (2/2) **10.0** Comedy Club: Olga Koch: OK Computer (1/4) **10.30** Njambi McGrath: Becoming Njambi (3/4) **10.45** Rhys James Is Wise (3/4) **10.55** The Comedy Club Interview **11.0** Vent (5/6) **11.30** Laura Solon: Talking and Not Talking (4/6) **12.0** Soul Music (4/5) **12.30** The Forum (3/5) **1.0** The Waiting Game (4/6) **1.30** Who Killed Aldrich Kemp? (5/5) **2.0** Little Blighty on the Down (5/5) **2.30** Beyond Our Ken **3.0** The Confessional (4/6) **3.30** Following Pappano (5/5) **3.45** Small Island (10/15) **4.0** The Museum of Curiosity (3/6) **4.30** Millport (3/6) **5.0** Berlin (2/2)



Quick crossword no 17,552



Across

1 Positive thinking (8)
5 Bird with ability to mimic human voice (4)
9 Beaton or B DeMille? (5)
10 Gymnastic entertainer (7)
11 Not sincere (12)
13 Sid - or Julius? (6)
14 One of the family - or one of the gang? (6)
17 Must-have (12)
20 Runs in tights (7)
21 Apply (oneself) (5)
22 Follow orders (4)
23 Mint (5-3)

Down

1 As soon as (4)
2 Nice to touch (7)
3 Having many aspects (12)
4 Hirsute (6)
6 Lout (5)
7 Creative skill (8)
8 1818 Mary Shelley novel (12)
12 Resort on Mexico's Pacific coast (8)
15 In the middle of (7)
16 It marks one's place on a computer (6)
18 Comedian Murphy or Frasier dog (5)
19 Simmer (with anger perhaps) (4)

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Sudoku no 7,408

Hard. Fill the grid so that each row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1-9.

4			3			6		
			1	8	6			
							7	2
8	6			9		2		
	9		2	6	8		5	
	2			4			8	
9			6					1
		6		3	2			
		7				4		

Suguru

Fill the grid so that each square in an outlined block contains a digit. A block of two squares contains the digits 1 and 2, a block of three squares contains the digits 1, 2 and 3, and so on. No same digit appears in neighbouring squares, not even diagonally.

	4	3	2		
5					
	3				
		4			

Wordsearch

Can you find 15 words associated with wind in the grid? Words can run forwards, backwards, vertically or diagonally, but always in a straight, unbroken line.

D	T	K	O	O	N	I	H	C
O	V	O	R	T	E	X	M	K
C	L	V	R	S	S	C	X	E
C	D	A	I	N	Y	U	N	E
O	B	B	R	C	A	A	G	T
R	L	R	L	T	C	D	B	E
I	U	O	E	I	S	O	O	S
S	N	L	R	E	R	I	A	I
E	A	R	E	A	Z	L	M	A
G	U	R	Y	H	P	E	Z	N
H	T	Y	P	H	O	O	N	G

Yesterday's solutions

Sudoku no 7,407

8	4	7	3	5	6	1	9	2
3	9	5	7	1	2	6	4	8
1	6	2	9	8	4	5	3	7
7	3	6	1	4	9	8	2	5
9	1	8	2	3	5	7	6	4
2	5	4	6	7	8	9	1	3
6	2	3	5	9	7	4	8	1
5	8	1	4	6	3	2	7	9
4	7	9	8	2	1	3	5	6

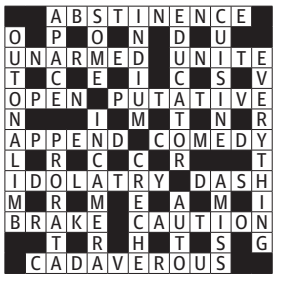
Word wheel
UNTAINTED

Suguru

1	5	1	4	1	2
3	2	3	2	3	5
4	5	1	5	4	1
2	3	4	3	2	3
4	1	2	1	5	4
2	3	4	3	2	1

Wordsearch

Solution no 17,551



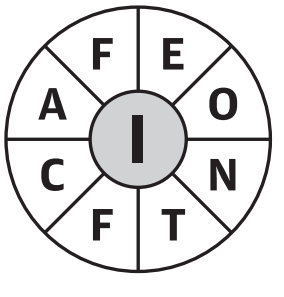
Trivia corner

Where did Coco Chanel open her first boutique?

a. Deauville
b. Paris
c. Biarritz
d. Bordeaux
Answer top right

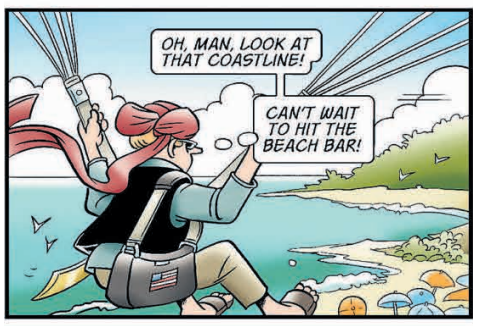
Word wheel

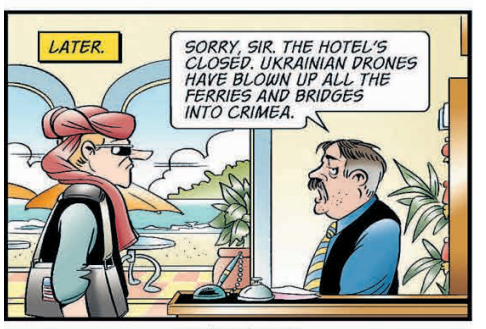
Find as many words as possible using the letters in the wheel. Each must use the central letter and at least three others. Letters may be used only once. You may not use plurals, foreign words or proper nouns. There is at least one nine-letter word to be found. Target: 19. Good: 24. Very good: 29. Excellent: 34.



Garry Trudeau

Doonesbury





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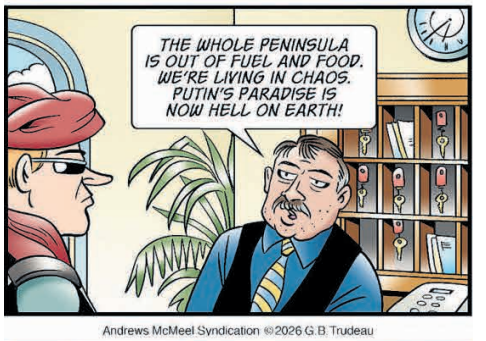
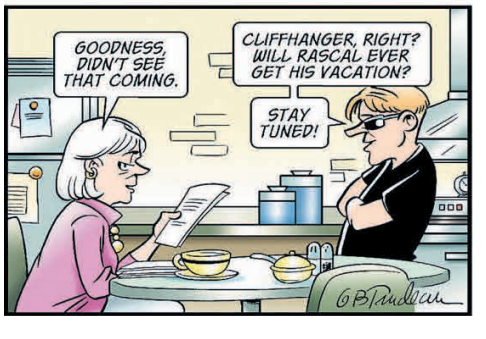
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